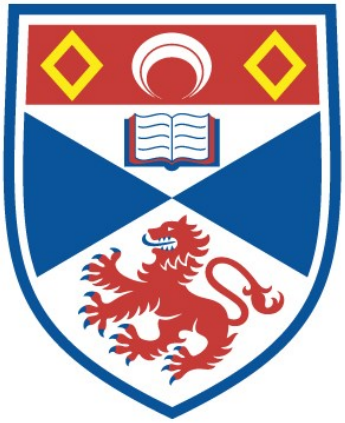
# THE FIELD-SIZED REPUBLIC : LANDSCAPE, LYRICISM AND VERSIONS OF SCOTTISH IDENTITY IN DOUGLAS DUNN'S POETRY, FROM `TERRY STREET' TO `THE YEAR'S AFTERNOON'

Attila Dósa

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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# THE FIELD-SIZED REPUBLIC

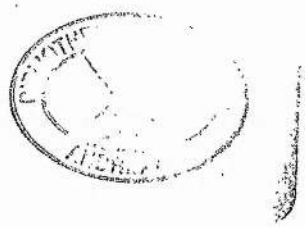
**Landscape, Lyricism and Versions of Scottish Identity in Douglas Dunn's Poetry from *Terry Street* to *The Year's Afternoon***

**by**

**ATTILA DÓSA**

*A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD*

*University of St Andrews, July 2001*



# Abstract

My thesis gives a Central-Eastern European reading of the development of Dunn's poetic representations of Scotland, with special emphasis on the uses of landscape and nature poetry, including versions of the pastoral.

Pragmatically, my reading of Dunn's work moves in the dual paradigm of nationality and internationalism, as I aim to illustrate in what ways these parallel affinities may enrich our readings by supplementing or on occasion complicating each other. This binary context is also essential to my procedure, in that national identity forms a part of my subject matter and my point of view as a Hungarian reader involves an international perspective.

My hypothesis is that Dunn's poetry, inasmuch as it speaks for the autonomy of imagination, is paradigmatic for the (re)formulation of an authentic but internationally minded Scottish literature. As understanding the motives behind its images abroad may inform a nation that wants to reshape its cultural position, I seek to offer feedback by reading Dunn's representations of Scotland from a Continental angle, as distinguished from habitual British or Scottish readings.

I address myself to the problems of literary provincialism, regionalism and inner emigration as potential sources of lyrical self-emancipation. I also investigate Dunn's transgression of secular apprehensions of landscape and chronology, which enables both the identity construction of the place in the present tense and the constant deferral of this identity to an indefinite future. I assume that in the course of this deferral nationality evolves into the subject of an open-ended semantic negotiation.

In general terms, I aim to challenge conventional beliefs about the relationship between the public and private responsibilities of poetry by considering the ways in which history, place and nationality converge in the voice of an essentially lyrical poet.

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# Contents

# Abbreviations

The following abbreviations of works by Douglas Dunn are used in this thesis:

*B* *Barbarians* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979)

*DDK* *Dante's Drum-kit* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993)

*DE* *The Donkey's Ears* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000)

*E* *Elegies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985)

*FB* ed., *The Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992)

*HL* *The Happier Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972)

*IL* *'Importantly Live': Lyricism in Contemporary Poetry*, An inaugural lecture delivered at The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Dundee University, 28 October 1987 (Dundee: Dundee University, 1988)

*LN* *Love or Nothing* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974)

*N* *Northlight* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988)

*PSP* 'The Predicament of Scottish Poetry', *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 March 1983, p. 273

*SA* ed., *Scotland: An Anthology* (London: HarperCollins, 1991)

*SKP* *St Kilda's Parliament* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981)

*SP* *Selected Poems 1964-1983* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986)

*TS* *Terry Street* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969)

*WTD* 'Writing Things Down', in *The Poet's Voice and Craft*, ed. by C. B. McCully (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), 84-103

*YA* *The Year's Afternoon* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000)

# Introduction

## The International Muse

### Language and identity

'Nationality doesn't identify "our side":/ Muses are international, and mine is a Lady' – in these lines from 'Audenesques for 1960' (*DDK*, 91), Douglas Dunn problematises the role of nationality in literature through challenging the idea of the 'national muse'. He suggests that nationality does not necessarily determine a poet's conditions as long as imagination has the power to stand free of national ties. But this argument is not to be taken too seriously. He dissolves the gravity of the topic when he describes his international muse as a Lady who 'speaks all sorts of languages (in translation),/ Collects guidebooks, maps, timetables, menus,/ Wine lists, and other hedonistic souvenirs' (*DDK*, 91). Although he has been prone to slip out of national frameworks of poetry, he has always stressed his fidelity to his native Scotland, even when he was living elsewhere. 'I think my main commitment to place is to the place I come from', he said shortly before his relocation to Scotland in 1984.[1] Dunn is a poet of place, and has developed lasting affiliation to various locations in different lands: Humberside in England; Tursac in the South of France; and Clydeside, Tayside and North-East Fife in Scotland. His material stems mainly from local and personal sources, but the inspiration and aesthetic considerations with which he is ready to align himself are likely to be based on his extensive reading which includes international literatures.

When Cairns Craig says that the 'language of literature, for every Scottish writer, is a matter of choice, and those choices form an integral part of the act of

[1] John Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', in *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 11-34 (p. 16).

writing',[2] he seems to imply that existence between languages is an instinctive part of a Scottish writer's apparatus. But Dunn sees this linguistic relativity as profoundly problematic when he describes a generally hostile sensitivity to the presence (or in his own case rather the absence) of a marked Scottish linguistic idiom in poetry, and the potential controversy emerging from the poet's choice of language, accent or register:

> It is probably impossible for a writer in Scotland to accept language as one of life's given stabilities. Notional English-English is not a yardstick that a poet in Scotland takes seriously as something against which to measure his or her own use of English. A Scottish accent defines itself in its own country, and, first of all, against traditions of writing to which a Scottish voice relates. There can be a certain kind of snobbishness attached to this awareness of accent and voice, most of it, but not all, of the inverted kind. When it comes to Scottishness in writing, Scottish critics can be as alert as a head waiter with his eyes peeled for the entrance of a gentleman without a tie, or, as I am talking of *demotic* consciousness, of a diner *with* a tie. (*WTD*, 87)

What he perceives as the decline of the Scots language and its subsequent replacement by 'Standard' English (with or without a Scottish accent) in the history of Scottish culture induces Dunn to describe the modern English-language writer as a 'rootless cosmopolitan', a term he borrows from Günter Grass (*WTD*, 89). The fading importance of the former national tongue of Scotland generates the sense of being deprived of the 'givenness' of language. He regards this linguistic rift as an existential hiatus into which Scotland has been '*forced*', and partly which Scots allowed to happen (*WTD*, 89). This self-scorning tone combined with a sense of fatalism is reminiscent of Edwin Muir's opinion as proposed in *Scott and Scotland*, which Dunn extensively quotes in the introduction to his Faber anthology of modern Scottish poetry. Muir

[2] Cairns Craig, 'Twentieth Century Scottish Literature: An Introduction', in *The History of Scottish Literature*, ed. by Cairns Craig, 4 vols. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), III: *The Twentieth Century*, 1-9 (p. 4).

projected his world view onto the cultural development of Scotland as he saw it earlier in the twentieth century, and a similar kind of Schillerian sentimentalism characterises Dunn's lyricism on the doorstep of the new millennium.

'[A]ch well/ all livin language is sacred', Tom Leonard writes in 'Ghostie Men'.[3] But the apparent pluralism in language and dialect as a potential source of cultural cross-fertilisation is not at all unproblematic. Among the more recent twentieth-century poets it was the late Iain Crichton Smith who wrote about Scotland's linguistic fluidity with a distress comparable to Muir's, from his own perspective as a (Gaelic and English) bilingual writer: 'the problem of the bilingual is perhaps that leaving one language behind he cannot quite exactly get the ways of speaking the new language'.[4] Moreover, in the aftermath of MacDiarmid's synthetic Scots, some argue that Scots, the third language of the country, retains a sense of artificiality on the page, especially when it is accompanied by glosses or an English translation. Richard Price suggests that 'it is only poetry which self-consciously exploits the paradox of the foreignness of one's "own national language", accepts the artifice as such, [and] that it is only poetry that in fact goes beyond the fond acknowledgement of the Scots language's plasticity and makes its synthetic qualities an analogue for other concerns (such as sexuality)'.[5] Mention must be made of those who recognise the heterogeneous linguistic situation of Scotland as one which opens up the prospect of internationalising Scottish literature. In his 1971 essay 'Registering the Reality of Scotland' Edwin Morgan highlighted the verity that 'the complexities and ambiguities of the language

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[3] Tom Leonard, 'Ghostie Men', in *Intimate Voices: Selected Work 1965-1983* (Newcastle: Galloping Dog Press, 1984), 103-21 (p. 120).

[4] Iain Crichton Smith, 'The Double Man', in *The Literature of Region and Nation*, ed. by R. P. Draper (London: Macmillan, 1989), 136-46 (p. 145). Iain Crichton Smith finds an interesting correlative for bilingualism in the two-coloured dress of the mediaeval jester, which appears in his Gaelic-language poem 'The Fool', and the same dilemma emerges in his comic novel *Thoughts of Murdo* (Nairn: Balnain Books, 1993).

[5] Richard Price, 'Atlantis', *Verse*, 15.1-2 (1998), 24-27 (p. 25).

situation in Scotland mirror the uncertainties, antagonisms, and ambitions of social life'.[6] Morgan drew attention to the potentially fruitful aesthetics of linguistic heterogeneity: 'It may be, that we have a blessing in disguise'.[7] Since then, writers like Tom Leonard, Liz Lochhead, Robert Crawford, Kathleen Jamie, W. N. Herbert, Irvine Welsh, James Kelman, Don Paterson, and Morgan himself have undertaken to fulfil that 'blessing'.

The present thesis seeks to convince its readers that the 'rootless cosmopolitan' approach does not set up an appropriate cultural or linguistic paradigm in which we may fruitfully discuss Dunn's poetry, and aims to achieve it by following two paths: by mapping his roots in Scotland on the one hand, and by extending the notion 'cosmopolitan' from a British to an international context on the other. While Dunn seems to associate the word 'cosmopolitan' with a sense of being an outsider (that is where he finds justification to use a related term, 'inner émigré'), I take it in its original meaning ('*Weltbürger*') when projecting it onto the cultural field. Apart from an English-language poetic tradition that has been shaped by writers like Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and Auden (but also by Scott, Yeats, Dylan Thomas, and T. S. Eliot), Dunn's work feeds on wider European reading which includes Ovid, Horace, Dante and Pushkin. A phrase like 'many-rooted cosmopolitan', then, could more aptly characterise him, and most of us, readers, who expose ourselves to the influences of different cultures and acknowledge the numerous identities we have at any time. 'Many-rootedness' is not merely a consequence of having several allegiances, but refers to an ability to concede to, and creatively exploit, them.

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[6] Edwin Morgan, 'Registering the Reality of Scotland', in *Essays* (Cheadle: Carcanet, 1974), 153-57 (p. 154).
[7] Ibid., 156.

Linden Peach gives an updated version of Grass's term when he writes: 'modern identities are being shaped through a process that is both multilayered and international'.[8] This suggests that a writer who absorbs foreign influences may also possess several identities at home, ranging from the local to the national. In Dunn's work we find poems reflecting a marked local identity which is related to his native region ('Landscape with One Figure' and 'Clydesiders') as well as his new, adopted home, North-East Fife ('At Falkland Palace', 'Here and There'), whereas poems like 'St Kilda's Parliament: 1879-1979', 'An Address on the Destitution of Scotland', 'Witch-girl' and 'Dressed to Kill' record a Scottish national consciousness. His small-town identity is relevant to most of his short stories, and a larger-scale solidarity defines his anthologies of Scottish cultural history, poetry and prose writing. As he lives and works in a specific social, political and cultural environment that is characteristic of the group of islands off the north-west coast of continental Europe, we may say that he possesses a supra-ethnic, British 'national' identity. This comes to the surface in 'A Poem in Praise of the British', which, of course, is not without a note of social criticism. Apart from the web of these historical and personal, regional and national affinities, Dunn's poetry reveals a remarkably international interest, which comes to the fore especially in his celebratory poem *Europa's Lover* and in the more recent *The Donkey's Ears*.

My reading of Dunn's poetic work from *Terry Street* to *The Year's Afternoon* moves in the dual paradigm of nationality and internationalism. Rather than regarding the two as separate parts in a larger continuum, or as the opposite ends of a trajectory, I wish to illustrate in what ways these parallel affinities may enrich our readings by

[8] Linden Peach, 'Wales and the Cultural Politics of Identity: Gillian Clarke, Robert Minhinnick, and Jeremy Hooker', in *Contemporary British Poetry: Essays in Theory and Criticism*, ed. by James Acheson and Romana Huk (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 373-96 (p. 374).

supplementing or sometimes complicating each other. This binary context is essential to my procedure in that national identity forms a part of my subject matter and my point of view as a Hungarian reader involves an international perspective. My thesis gives a Central-Eastern European reading of the development of Dunn's poetic representations of Scotland, with special emphasis on regional and national identities and the European dimension of his work. If nationality may function so as to bridge the gap between local and international affiliations, internationalism may also establish links between different nationalities. I emphasise at this point that, having spent a relatively long time studying at British universities, my critical apparatus may not be typical of where I come from. But I believe that I still may be able to present a reading of Dunn's work which is to some extent different from its usual interpretations. The possibility always remains that the text will suffer incomplete interpretation due to an insufficient knowledge of its source culture. But it may also acquire an extra significance during a cross-cultural dialogue, since reading may be complemented with a different experience. I am convinced that a reader whose consciousness originates in another background should never pretend to have comprehended a foreign text in the same way as does a reader from its own interpretive community. In most cases, a foreigner will estimate a literary work according to a horizon of expectations which has been shaped by a knowledge of his or her own culture. Even if this reader is more or less familiar with the source culture, he or she will never be able to read entirely differently from his or her own reading habits, because he or she will never possess the entire set of references of the source language. Reading in translation makes this contact even more complicated.

Internationalism may define not only an interpretive horizon as in the present case, but, in a broader context, the term also refers to the receptivity to foreign

influences and mediation between cultures which are essential to sustaining a healthy cultural milieu. Crawford argues for the importance of this kind of openness for the academic recognition of the autonomy of Scottish literature at home and abroad:

> What needs to be sounded is not a pugnacious Wee Scotlandism, but a note of confident Scottish internationalism. It is to be hoped [...] that a wider international understanding of the history of the university subject of English, and of the legacy of the subject in Scotland, will heighten the awareness of the current position of Scottish Literature which remains too often either ignored or lumped in with 'English', its cultural inflections and position airbrushed away in syllabuses across five continents. [...] [The] internationalization, and the wider understanding of Scotland's position in (and repression by) the development of university English may help criticism of Scottish Literature escape from a continuing danger of ghettoization.[9]

Beside the call for supporting the foundation of Scottish Institutes abroad, the translation of Scottish literature into foreign languages is also starting to get more attention. The promotion of translation is an aspect of cultural expansion which, in proportion to their economic potentials, every nation seeks to endorse. On the other end of the (ideally) bilateral project of internationalisation there is the need to become familiar with the literatures of other nations. It may come about by way of translating foreign works into one of the native languages of Scotland, or it may take place through assimilating bits of other cultures into original works. Probably more importantly than his work as a translator of Racine and Leopardi, Dunn often incorporates allusions to foreign literatures into his poetry. His references reveal a refined interest in a wide range of international literatures, which he melds into his own writing with a principled aestheticism.

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[9] Robert Crawford, 'Scottish Literature and English Studies', in *The Scottish Invention of English Literature*, ed. by Robert Crawford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 225-46 (p. 240).

In cultural terms, these days, Robert Burns's proverbial lines 'O wad some Power the giftie gie us/ Too see oursels as ithers see us!'[10] probably have a more pressing relevance than ever. In a forthright echo of a dictum by Seamus Heaney (who himself echoes Joyce's Stephen Dedalus) that 'the shortest way to Whitby [...] is via Warsaw or Prague',[11] Crawford advocates the cultivation of extrovert thinking: 'It is the outward-looking, expansive gaze which makes possible the interaction with a "significant other", a foreign culture in which gifts for the future of one's own culture may be located, and in which illuminating reflection of one's own identity [...] may be glimpsed'.[12] Crawford, like many contemporary Scottish critics and writers, has been inspired by the Bakhtinian notion of 'outsideness', to which we may give credit not only in interpersonal perception or in the interpretation of literary works, but also in instances of cross-cultural contact. 'It is only in the eyes of *another* culture that a foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly', the Russian philosopher wrote.[13] A nation may reach a more subtle understanding of its own culture when some of its writers can dislodge themselves from the familiarity of their own background, and so temporarily assume a different perspective. Understanding the motives behind its images abroad may provide useful feedback for a nation to reshape its own cultural

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[10] Robert Burns, 'To a Louse, On Seeing One on a Lady's Bonnet at Church', in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. by James Kinsley, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), I: *Text*, 193-94 (p. 194). Compare this with Adam Smith's contemporary opinion: 'We can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us. But we can do this in no other way than by endeavouring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them'. In: Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), I, 110.

[11] Seamus Heaney, 'The Impact of Translation' in *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 36-44 (p. 41).

[12] Robert Crawford, *Identifying Poets: Self and Territory in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 12.

[13] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Response to a Question from the *Novy Mir* Editorial Staff', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. by Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 1-9 (p. 7) .

position in the world. My thesis seeks to offer such feedback by reading Dunn's representations of Scotland from a Central-Eastern European viewpoint, as distinguished from habitual British or Scottish readings. Thus the subject's multiple reflection may draw attention to issues which might have been hidden when regarded from familiar perspectives.

There remains one term that needs clarification: 'Central-Eastern European viewpoint'. The difference between Central-Eastern European and British readers could be the subject of an entire book on the sociology of reading. Let me refer here just very briefly to the dissimilar perception of literature that characterises the eastern half of the Continent, and determines the general attitude of a reader from those parts, an attitude which is markedly different from that of the British literary audience. In most of these countries, like Poland for example, or even Russia, or, in the case of the present thesis, Hungary, literature has been a very important means of survival: both for individuals and for the larger community. In Hungary, in the Middle Ages and later a significant part of aristocratic and even ecclesiastic literature was subordinated to political issues related to the Turkish and Austrian military invasions that threatened the existence of the whole nation: individual lives, political and religious institutions, language and identity. This function of literature has continued to exist and was especially paramount in the twentieth century, when the danger and then the actual reality of repeated invasions by Nazi Germany and Communist Russia demanded a keen political awareness from all people and, most importantly in the present context, from writers, so much so that the phrase 'political writer' became a tautology. This awareness also came to play, for a short time at least, an important role after the changes in 1989, when a major portion of the seats in the first democratically elected parliament was taken by artist, writers and scholars. Árpád Göncz, who was chosen the

first President of the Hungarian Republic, is a renowned writer and translator of prose fiction. The period of post-war totalitarian regimes was, we might even say, worse than the initial phase of Nazism for many of these writers, inasmuch as under Communist rule there was no third way, no possibility of 'inner emigration' or withdrawal from politics: writers and artists had to be either loyal or in opposition. Sándor Weöres, who was interested in anything but the political power of literature, was silenced for decades, because what he enjoyed in poetry (its ludic, mysterious and Protean nature) was not seen as endorsing the serious purposes of the socialist revolution, and what was simply his non-interest in socialist realism was taken as a sign of resistance. Of course, opposition was expressed through various, Aesopean ways: always pushing the limits of what could be said a little further, until those limits would finally disappear. So, when the take-over of power eventually occurred in 1989, for some of the writers their missions were accomplished. When everything could be said, there was nothing left to say: they either turned to the past or became silent. The loss of the old idea of being in opposition proved to be a traumatic experience for many artists. This explains the case of some of the celebrated non-conformist novelists, such as Péter Nádas, who has published no new fiction since his acclaimed *Book of Memories* came out in 1986, or Péter Esterházy, who very recently made a spectacular comeback with a book of memoirs after about a decade of silence.

The long tradition of the large-scale responsibilities of literature gave rise to an elitist view of culture in many of these Central and Eastern European countries. In our age of relativism there is still a very strong and clear division between high literature and popular writing ('ponyva') or the best-seller, which is normally used as a depreciative term in Hungary. After forty years of Communist attempts to eradicate class differences in society, higher education still can be seen as elitist, and university

training is far less inclusive and common than it could be in this particular country. The gap looks perhaps even more so definitive from the other side: a degree is frequently regarded with suspicion at least, if not, as is also often the case, with antipathy, by people with average education. In literary criticism this sense of seriousness and elitism resulted on the one hand in the supremacy of theory (as opposed to the common sense that is defended often vigorously in the British academia), and on the other in an exclusive, almost clannish, fashion of prose writing that sometimes breaks even the basic rules of lucidity. The style of literary criticism is characterised in general by a widespread use of foreign words even where their native counterparts exist, and long, winding or many times mannerist sentences. This kind of writing seems to serve the purposes of communication only among the members of a select audience. In the course of the past four years that I have spent studying in Britain I have come to appreciate the democratic ambition that identifies the greater part of literary criticism in this country: the ambition to be intelligible, and to be accessible to as many people as it can possibly reach. During this time a considerable portion of my earlier convictions planted by my education and background has eroded in me and I have no regret. I have written this thesis with a British readership in mind, which means that I have tried to accommodate my writing to their needs as much as I have been able to in terms of the clarity, brevity and transparency of my style. But, obviously, some elements of my 'heritage' may shine through: especially my reading, the perception of what is political and what is not in literature, and even perhaps the slightly different interpretation of certain terms and concepts. I have brought some examples from various Central and Eastern European writers (most of them more familiar to a British reader, like Pushkin or József, some of them maybe less, like Radnóti) in order to shed light on familiar

issues from a slightly different angle, and to establish some, I hope, novel connections between aspects of poetry written in Britain and elsewhere.

My hypothesis is that inasmuch as it speaks for the autonomy of imagination, Dunn's poetry is paradigmatic for the (re)formulation of an authentic but internationally minded Scottish literature that wishes to challenge the cultural ascendancy of the university subject of 'English Literature'. My motivation for writing this thesis was that as a foreign reader I found his work representative of a cosmopolitan Scotland. First of all, as I try to suggest in my thesis, he has a firms sense of what Scotland means to him without flaunting his Scottishness, or subordinating his poetry to any political interpretation of national identity. An other component of his representativeness is the shared stock of literary and historical knowledge which he uses to model Scottish life meaningfully for a foreign readership. The third component, I suggest, is linguistic. Dunn writes in a form of literary English, into which he blends occasional Scottish vernacular or dialectal words. He speaks English with a marked Scottish accent, and lays some but not too much emphasis on this accent in his verse. In print, however, accent (which relates to speech) only becomes noticeable at certain line-endings, where the reader finds words that rhyme when pronounced with a Scottish accent but not in RP, for instance 'Bach' and 'loch' in 'Loch Music' (*SKP*, 79). This may be taken as a sophisticated expression of his linguistic difference that constitutes a Scottish identity in relation to 'Standard' English. Alan Sinfield reports that a lot of his friends lost their interest in reading Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* because they found it 'hard-going'.[14] It is a useful piece of information on the sociology of reading in Britain, as in this case, it may be argued, the audience shared the author's

[14] Alan Sinfield, 'The politics and culture of discord (1997)', in *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, 2nd edn (London: Athlone Press, 1997), xi-xxx (p. xxvi).

language (English), except that the phonetic transcription of the dialect used by Welsh was unusual. Talking of poetry, *Six Glasgow Poems* or *Unrelated Incidents* by Tom Leonard, or some of W. N. Herbert's poems in a form of synthetic Scots may pose a similar degree of difficulty, especially for a foreign reader. In translation, these texts will probably lose the particularity of their constituting linguistic difference as opposed to RP, which, by transfer, serves as the primary meaning in Leonard, and as a supplemental but still very important semantic layer in Herbert. Compared to these two randomly taken representatives of modern dialectal poetry, I suggest, Dunn's occasional use of vernacular words and his accent provide his writing with a distinctively Scottish tone, though without the purpose of making it the focus of signification, which may be lost in translation, and without deeply affecting comprehension. Finally, an objective measure of conceptual accessibility for a foreign readership is translatability. Dunn's poetry has been disseminated in a number of European languages including French, German, Polish, Czech, Macedonian and Hungarian, and he is a well-known ambassador of Scottish literature abroad.

Pragmatically, my account of Dunn's poetry follows a chronological order. Rather than trying to split up his career into periods, my main procedure was to discuss those successive collections which allow similar thematic and practical approaches within a chapter. The starting point is his first book, *Terry Street*, and where I break my journey is *The Year's Afternoon*, the volume published in the last academic year of the writing of this thesis. For reasons of space, an in-depth discussion of his two books of short stories, *Secret Villages* and *Boyfriends and Girlfriends*, and his translations of poetry and drama would have been impossible, though mention will be made of them at appropriate places. I aimed to embrace as many of the critical articles, essays, and biographical writings and interviews relevant to the subject as my scope allowed.

While poetry remains my main interest in thesis, I touch upon the role Dunn has played in drawing the cultural map of Scotland as an anthologist.

The first chapter takes Robert Crawford's term 'identifying poet' as its point of departure. In Crawford's opinion a distinctive voice, a sense of history and a sense of community are needed to express a poet's local or regional affiliations. I highlight the evolution of these three factors in the Scottish poems of Dunn's first three collections, from *Terry Street* to *Love or Nothing*, paying special attention to perceptions of time and place in the expression of his affinity with his native Clydeside. Here my assumption is that the gradual destabilisation of the photographic technique helped him to achieve more authentic representations of a local and then a broader collective consciousness. Scottish subject matters form a relative minority in his first three books. But the evolution from a recording to an involved, 'identifying' lyric is in essence fulfilled in *Love or Nothing*, and so this collection may be seen as the first comprehensive expression of his identity as a Scottish poet.

Chapter Two makes use of Bakhtin's and especially Jauss's dialogic models of understanding in locating problems of authority, social register and cultural polarisation in Dunn's dialogues with tradition in *Barbarians*, *St Kilda's Parliament* and *Europa's Lover*, but without the intention of initiating a theoretically overcharged rumination to the detriment of poetry. I shall investigate the ways in which, in an attempt to revise the Cartesian pattern of observation and reflection, his interest shifts towards a publicly engaged poetry, and extends his horizon from a regional to a national and international field. I also aim to explore the links between Horatian provincialism as a form of lyrical self-emancipation and the democratic imagination that defines Dunn's politics by identifying the source of his spiritual republicanism in the poetics of the commonplace. Finally, I track the dialectic nature of his large-scale solidarities inherent

in the tension between his dehistoricisation of nationality and his awareness of economic exploitation as it appears in *Europa's Lover*.

Chapter Three aims to problematise conventional beliefs about the incongruity between the private world of lyricism and national identity with reference to *Elegies*. My assumption is that the kind of lyrical and elegiac sensibility Dunn exhibits in this collection is far from being an insulated phenomenon in his work. This chapter investigates the evolution of lyricism and spiritualism in a story of love and grief, with special attention to the ways in which these concerns affect the stylistic apparatus of his later poems about place and community, and in which they determine the further development of his insight into history and nationality. I also consider the implications of his perceptions of femininity and his visual imagination for his apprehension of the term 'lyricism', and examine narrative structure, formalism and intertextuality in the volume usually seen as the summit of his poetic achievement to date.

In the fourth chapter, which is about *Northlight*, I address myself to the problems of literary 'provincialism', regionalism, and 'inner emigration' and its related terms. Furthermore, I discuss the critical concept of 'in-betweenness', and also look at various definitions of 'nation' and 'nationalism' in the context of Dunn's metonymical extension of a local to a national identity. Finally, I investigate his transgression of secular apprehensions of landscape and chronology, which enables both the identity construction of the place in the present tense and the constant deferral of this identity to an indefinite future, assuming that in the course of this postponement nationality evolves into being the subject of an open-ended semantic negotiation.

Chapter Five considers Dunn's changing apprehension of a politically responsible literature by analysing the split of the earlier synthesis of nature lyric and history as manifested in *Dante's Drum-kit*. While also discussing some of his topical

writings and anthologies, I map the various routes of disengagement, including the practice of literariness and representations of the commonplace, in his work. In this chapter I address issues of nationality, language, and the potential of poetry as a channel of social criticism. I also examine the ways in which he transcends the topicality and historicity of literature by drawing inspiration from the natural environment for a political idealism that leads to an inclusive definition of the nation in his poetry.

Finally, the sixth chapter, on *The Donkey's Ears* and *The Year's Afternoon*, considers the apparent further polarisation of timeless lyricism and historically situated perceptions of literature. By affirming universal values and celebrating individual freedom, I suggest, Dunn achieves a new synthesis of the private and public art that is realised outside the literary work, in the subjectivity of the writer and reader of poetry. The themes of stock-taking, retrospection, elegy and botanical sensibility will also be discussed in the last chapter with the ambition to round off an account of Douglas Dunn's poetic career to date.

# Chapter One

## Landscapes with One Figure

### Place and chronology in *Terry Street*, *The Happier Life* and *Love or Nothing*

'Over the years my writing has tried to keep a promise with a Scottish, rural working-class background', Dunn says.[1] He adds, 'To persevere with the art of poetry is to pick up a bet you make with yourself. Nationality and background are involved in the bet I made'. In this chapter I will track the evolution of Dunn's national and class affiliations through analysing the chronologically based representation of Scottish subject matters in his first three collections. Born in Renfrewshire, Scotland, Dunn moved south to read English at the University of Hull in 1966, and remained in England until 1983. He bought a flat in a run-down district of the city and the experience during his two years residence there provided the subject matter for his first and highly accomplished collection, *Terry Street*. In his second book, *The Happier Life*, he continued the themes of social and existential deprivation in more general terms. His experimentalism and eclecticism in the subsequent *Love or Nothing* has received much less critical acclaim. But I will attribute a significant role to this collection, suggesting that there is a coincidence between the shaping of his Scottish poetic consciousness and the widening of the temporal horizon in *Love or Nothing*. My argument is based on the presence of the entire time scale in this book as opposed to the incomplete horizons of *Terry Street* and *The Happier Life*. In particular, I am concerned with the way that temporal awareness can reflect cultural and territorial identities, presupposing that the

[1] P. R. King, 'Three New Poets: Douglas Dunn, Tom Paulin, Paul Mills', in *Nine Contemporary Poets: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1979), 220-43 (p. 221).

photographic method that characterised Dunn's poetry mainly before 1974 was incapable of accommodating chronology, a sense of community and the representation of voices.

In analysing Scottish identities in Dunn's early poetry, Robert Crawford's concept of 'the identifying poet' may prove to be a useful point of departure. Crawford is concerned with 'the way twentieth-century poets construct for themselves an identity which allows them to identify with or to be identified with a particular territory'.[2] He presents individual studies in the works of 'identifying poets' (including Robert Frost, Hugh MacDiarmid, Les Murray and Douglas Dunn), that is poets who 'have made for themselves identities which let them be identified with, re-state, and even renovate the identity of a particular territory'.[3] In general, Crawford seems to imply that history, voice and a sense of community are the most essential prerequisites for the expression of national or regional consciousness in literature:

> Home is a place with a dialect and tradition. Sometimes writers, whether James MacPherson or T. S. Eliot, attempt to make up a tradition which stands in lieu of home. A tradition isn't just an academic's card index, it can also be a writer's life-support-system; writing is usually a solitary activity, but encouragement and stimulation often come from knowing oneself part of a historical or geographical community of voices.[4]

In the critical convention Dunn's early poetry is not regarded as relevant to Scottish identities. W. N. Herbert argues that to a Scottish reader 'Dunn's distinctive voice begins with *Barbarians*'.[5] Although that collection does present a recognisably

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[2] Crawford, *Identifying Poets*, 1.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 149.
[5] W. N. Herbert, 'Dunn and Dundee: Dunn's Re-entry into Scottish Culture', in *Reading Douglas Dunn*, ed. by Robert Crawford and David Kinloch, Modern Scottish Writers Series (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 122-37 (p. 123).

Scottish voice, other critics put the commencement of a new stage in Dunn's career at an even later point. Robert Crawford suggests that 'While Scottish subject matter and concerns were present from Dunn's first book, and were particularly important in *Barbarians*, it is in 1981 with *St Kilda's Parliament* that the "matter of Scotland" achieves an undisputed centrality in Dunn's shaping of an individual collection'.[6] In what follows I wish to show that we may find the origins of a complex, autobiographically considered Scottish identity in *Love or Nothing*. In various interviews, Dunn has insisted that an orientation towards Scotland has always been present in his poetry.[7] In this respect Cairns Craig presents a subtle observation when he suggests a gradual transition rather than a rift between English and Scottish themes, and locates this transition in *Love or Nothing* and *Barbarians*. Craig grounds his argument on the nature of autobiographical poetry: 'Autobiography requires the recognition of a place, a region, and that place or region requires not just a personal history but a public history with which the poet is engaged'.[8] I shall investigate the significance of autobiography in detail later, assuming that it is not autobiography that depends on the recognition of a place, but, vice versa, the recognition of a place or a community depends on a sense of chronology, and one form of chronological awareness is autobiographical writing.

Technique imposes probably the greatest restriction on potential expressions of identity. Jerzy Jarniewicz argues that 'Dunn's is not a poetry of perception, its main theme being culture: cultural relativism, cultural changes, cultural hegemony,

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[6] Robert Crawford, 'Secret Villager', in *Reading Douglas Dunn*, ed. by Robert Crawford and David Kinloch, Modern Scottish Writers Series (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 108-21 (p. 108).

[7] See, for example: Sean O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil: Douglas Dunn', in *The Printer's Devil: A Magazine of New Writing*, ed. by Sean O'Brien and Stephen Plaice (South-East Arts: Tunbridge Wells, 1990), 12-33 (p. 15).

[8] Cairns Craig, 'From the Lost Ground: Liz Lochhead, Douglas Dunn, and Contemporary Scottish Poetry', in *Contemporary British Poetry: Essays in Theory and Criticism*, ed. by James Acheson and Romana Huk (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 343-72 (p. 369).

etc'.[9] But Dunn's early poetic technique, which he employs extensively in *Terry Street*, is now commonly described as 'photographic method'. In his analysis of social concerns in Dunn's poetry, Bernard O'Donoghue uses the phrase to identify this procedure,[10] and Dunn himself talks about his own writing before 1974 in the same terms.[11] The portrait-like recordings of the details of, or episodes from, lower-class existence have brought about the application of the vocabulary of not only photography, but sometimes also film-making. A contemporary reviewer dwindles the comparison even to burlesque: 'He has been in there, like a Disney cameraman parked up a palm-tree with his head disguised as a coconut: he has shot the stuff and has got it out'.[12] Photography has been a rich source of inspiration for Dunn ever since *Terry Street*, but in retrospect he claims it put a certain restriction on his creativity: 'In a way I regret that particular moment because it meant that perhaps my imagination wasn't being tested as much as it should have been or that it was being used to come up with imagery closer to photography than artistic composition'.[13]

Roland Barthes points out that photography belongs to the present tense, because the recorded moment always pertains to the realm of particularity:

> What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially. In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the *This* (this photograph, and not Photography), in short, what Lacan

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[9] Jerzy Jarniewicz, *The Uses of the Commonplace in Contemporary British Poetry: Larkin, Dunn and Raine* (Lódz: University of Lódz, 1994), 100.
[10] Bernard O'Donoghue, 'Moving Towards a Vernacular of Compassion: *The Happier Life*, *Love or Nothing* and *Barbarians*', in *Reading Douglas Dunn*, ed. by Robert Crawford and David Kinloch, Modern Scottish Writers Series (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 32-50 (pp. 33 *ff*).
[11] Colin Nicholson, 'Dimensions of the Sentient' [an interview with Douglas Dunn], in *Poem, Purpose and Place: Shaping Identity in Contemporary Scottish Verse*, Determinations Series (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), 183-202 (p. 190).
[12] Clive James, 'Adding Up the Detail' [a review of *TS*], *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 November 1969, p. 1330.
[13] O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil', 15.

> calls the *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression.[14]

The poems in the 'Terry Street' sequence cannot be subjected to Barthes's interpretation of photography in that it is possible to read the history of Dunn's portraits about the people who lived then and there, because he seeks to find the 'absolute General' rather than the 'absolute Particular' in their lives. 'A Removal from Terry Street' conjures up the past and the aspirations of a family by giving an image of their possessions, among them a lawnmower, while we know that 'There is no grass in Terry Street' (*TS*, 20). Similarly, in 'On Roofs of Terry Street' the builder's spontaneous movement – 'He kneels upright to rest his back' (*TS*, 21) – suggests the story of a life spent with labour. These characters have a personal history because Dunn represents in them what is human and therefore universal. But the poet, in his role as an interpreter, mostly remains in the background, and indeed, his activity reminds the reader of a recording camera. In the purely descriptive 'On Roofs of Terry Street', for instance, the poet's subjective self entirely disappears. As a consequence, in Dunn's early poetry photographic representation may be detailed and artistically sensitive, but, as to the existence of the observing self, its temporal spectrum is very often of a blink of the eye. As Dave Smith suggests, the speaker is 'immersed entirely in a present tense'.[15] Dunn interestingly notes about these poems that, being an outsider in that district, 'it was impossible to write about the past'.[16]

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[14] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1984), 4.

[15] Dave Smith, 'Them and Uz: Douglas Dunn's Technique', in *Reading Douglas Dunn*, ed. by Robert Crawford and David Kinloch, Modern Scottish Writers Series (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 80-93 (p. 81).

[16] Douglas Dunn, 'Memories of 26 Flixbro Terrace, Terry Street, Hull, 1966-1968', in *Terry Street: A Bête Noire Special Edition, Featuring Douglas Dunn and Robert Whitaker*, 16 (1994), 7-15 (p. 14).

The photographic method, in this case, does not provide the first person singular of the poem with a sense of personal history.

Another major drawback of the photographic method in poetry is that it rarely exceeds the limitations of a temporally one-dimensional representation in linguistic terms. Linguistically, *Terry Street* is written in the present tense. There is only one poem, 'A Window Affair', which involves remembering, and is thus narrated in the past tense. Apart from that poem, past tense verbs occur only twice, in 'Patricians' and 'Sunday Morning Among the Houses of Terry Street', and future tense verbs again only twice (in 'Young Women in Rollers') in the opening sequence of the collection, which consists of eighteen poems altogether. Naturally, the sense of immediacy would affect the style of Dunn's writing. As Bernard O'Donoghue points out, a 'stylistic by-product of what Dunn seems to find limiting in the procedure of *Terry Street*, and a contributory factor to the two-dimensional feeling, is the rather dead hand of the neutral observer's present tense [...], often placed with a temporal reference'.[17]

It is not entirely impossible to represent the historical identity of the poetic self through photographic portrayal in poetry. We can find the best example in 'St Kilda's Parliament: 1879-1979', subtitled "The photographer revisits his picture", which commemorates the vanished community of the Scottish Isle of St Kilda:

> You need only look at the faces of these men
> Standing there like everybody's ancestors,
> This flick of time I shuttered on a face.
> (*SKP*, 14)

[17] O'Donoghue, 'Moving Towards a Vernacular of Compassion', 35.

Dunn exploits the chronological potentials of the poem in the extreme, but here he takes photography as an inspiration rather than a technique of writing. The poem, which is inspired by a hundred-year old photograph of the islanders, represents an imaginary voyage in time (back to the past) and space (to St Kilda). Dunn transforms the distance between the photographer's camera and the photographed people into a metaphorical distance between languages (Gaelic and English) and cultures (a primitive community is contrasted with modern, industrialised and urban life). At the same time, he blurs the difference between the then photographer and the photograph's modern audience, the Barthesian 'Operator' and 'Spectator'. The photograph's modern audience is us, the readers, and also the poet who was inspired by the picture. Dunn presents us with a similar image (although it cannot be the same, because it is a text) as the photographer saw through the lens of his camera. Only the difference is a hundred years. As the then Operator transforms into the modern Spectator, the metaphorical linguistic and cultural distance between the photographer and his subject changes into the distance between the modern audience (of the photograph and of the poem) and those lost people of St Kilda. And as time passes and the poem travels around the globe, in English or in other languages, the temporal and cultural distance will grow with spatial distance. But still, the poem will always be a reminder of that particular picture and of those people. In 'St Kilda's Parliament', then, the implied distance in the process of photograph-taking is not involved as a part of Dunn's technique, but, as opposed to the 'Terry Street' poems, it functions as a motif, just as the process of recording is not the poet's method, but his theme.

It seems paradoxical to expect a representation of voices in the framework of the photographic method. As Barthes suggests, photography does not relate to verbal

communication, because it applies a system of visual signs, and cannot be described with the terminology of linguistics:

> photography cannot be transformed (spoken) philosophically, it is wholly ballasted by the contingency of which it is the weightless, transparent envelope. Show your photographs to someone – he will immediately show you his: "Look, this is my brother; this is me as a child", etc.; the Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of "Look", "See", "Here it is"; it points a finger at certain *vis-à-vis*, and cannot escape this pure deictic language.[18]

Neither do the subject matters in Dunn's photographic poems relate to verbal communication in any significant way. Borrowing his own expression form 'The Silences', his poems in *Terry Street* may be described as recordings of 'urban silence' (*TS*, 32). Out of the twenty-two verbs of 'Landscape with One Figure' only one ('say') is related to human voice, whereas all the other verbs refer to silent actions, such as 'wait', 'gesticulate', 'quiver', 'wave', 'fall', 'sleep', 'look' or 'point'. The other Scottish landscape poem in the book, 'Ships', shows a similar distribution. While voice is represented by one verb (again 'say') and a short quotation from an imagined speech, apart from the swish of the waves, the rest of the verbs suggest silence on the river:

> When a ship passes at night on the Clyde,
> The swans in the reeds picking the oil from their feathers
> Look up at the lights, the noise of new waves,
> Against hill-climbing houses, malefic cranes.
> (*TS*, 59)

It is interesting to notice that while the verb 'say' occurs only once, 'look' appears three times in the same poem. The importance of gaze as a typical mode of

[18] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 5.

perception in the Scottish poems probably goes back to Dunn's daily experience in Terry Street. He remembers the residents of Terry Street in 'Memories of 26 Flixbro Terrace': 'Some of them seemed to spend a lot of time looking at me. I spent a lot of time looking back. Maybe that's what the poems are about'.[19] He gazed at his fellow residents from behind the seal of his window, and so noiselessness is particularly significant in the 'Terry Street' sequence. Poems like 'From the Night-window', 'Sunday Morning Among the Houses of Terry Street' and 'Late Night Walk Down Terry Street' evoke the quietness of the empty street. In 'A Window Affair' Dunn indulges in the images of silent communication, a visual flirtation through window-panes, while in 'The Silences' he offers an inquiry into a hermetic feeling of urban existence:

> It is urban silence, it is not a true silence.
> The main road, growling in the distance,
> Continuous, is absorbed into it;
> The birds, their noises become lost in it;
> Faint, civilised music decorates it.
> (*TS*, 32)

Silence is also a leitmotif in *The Happier Life*, as nine out of its thirty-nine poems are organised around it. Similarly to the 'Terry Street' sequence, 'Backwaters' regards quietness as a main attribute to urban living on geographical and social peripheries:

> They are silent places, dilapidated cities
> Obscure to the nation, their names spoken of
> In the capital with distinct pejorative overtones.
> (*HL*, 21)

[19] Dunn, 'Memories of 26 Flixbro Terrace', 8.

Other portrayals of urban life, such as 'The River Through the City', 'Modern Love' and 'Saturday Night Function', also focus on silence, whereas 'Fixed', 'Night', 'Billie 'n' Me', 'Alternative' and 'The Philologist' tend to describe the same phenomenon in the light of existential issues and in personal terms.

A further attribute of identifying poetry is acknowledging oneself as a member of the community. Dunn remarks that he was an outsider in Terry Street and that his allegiance to the place was only temporal.[20] The establishment of a sense of community presupposes more than a relative significance of the subject's position, as it is with the photographic poem, which reflects on the relationship between the observing self and the observed. Association with a community is paradoxical in photographic poetry inasmuch as it logically implies a distance between the observer ('self') and the observed ('other'). In the making of photography Barthes distinguishes between three discrete roles: those of the photographer, the subject of the photograph, and finally the audience. Barthes says, 'a photograph can be the object of three practices (or of three emotions, or of three intentions): to do, to undergo, to look'.[21] Photography, then, naturally implies a distance between the emotions and intentions of the photographer and the subject who is photographed, a distance which is unbridgeable and cannot be reconciled, in philosophical terms. We can find evidence of this in most of Dunn's photographic poems, and, to a certain extent, the same is true for the landscape poem 'Ships'. Although this poem is set in Scotland, the intentional hiatus involved in the act of photographic recording prevents Dunn from expressing the emotions that the locality could invoke in him. The lyrical first person singular (the 'I') is missing from the poem in syntactic terms. However accurate the portrayal of Clydeside may be regarding atmosphere and

[20] Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 19.
[21] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 9.

detail, we can hardly see the evidence of the poet's personal predisposition or attachment to the territory.

Photography and film remain key metaphors in Dunn's subsequent collections. It is enough to think of poems such as 'I Am a Cameraman' in *Love or Nothing* (41-42), 'Portrait Photograph, 1915' in *Barbarians* (35), the title poem of *St Kilda's Parliament* or the sequence 'Anon's People'.[22] Apart from these two, other forms of visual art, especially painting, also find their ways into Dunn's poetry – not necessarily in the form of technique, but in the form of inspiration. *Elegies* is particularly rich in such effects. References to visual art forms also assume a metaphorical function in his critical writing, and the best example is probably 'The Predicament of Scottish Poetry'.[23] But the photographic method will lose its previous centrality in *Love or Nothing*, which at once can be seen as the earliest convincing testimony of Dunn's Scottish poetic identity. The perspective of the photographic poem (with an implied distance between the observer and the observed that Barthes points out) does not leave much room for the poet to express his or her association with a community, a place or a tradition. The photographic poem does not normally accommodate the poet's own personal projections of the temporal dimensions of past and future. That is why it does not entertain a sense of the poet's private chronology, which is a part of public history, and is an essential channel for the expression of the poet's relation to what is common: his or her affinities, likes and dislikes. In other words, the representation of attachment to a place or cultural heritage needs a sense of chronology, which can be achieved through, for example,

[22] Douglas Dunn, 'Anon's People', *Glasgow Herald*, 28 January 1984, p. 7.
[23] Douglas Dunn, 'The Predicament of Scottish Poetry', *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 March 1983, p. 273.

the recollection or reinvention of personal or communal memories, experiences, and, parallel to that, through the anticipation of future attitudes.

Scottish settings are not entirely absent from Dunn's poetry before *Love or Nothing*. But descriptions of Scottish landscapes in *Terry Street* and *The Happier Life* conform to the general temperament in these two books, and so social concerns outweigh considerations of Scottish identity. This only reinforced critical opinions which classified him as an 'English' poet well into the 1980s.[24] Both 'Landscape with One Figure' and 'Ships' in *Terry Street* consider the sudden majesties and failures of working-class life. In equal measure, both poems can be related to perceptions of identity. In *The Happier Life* Dunn expands the interpretive horizon of the previous book from discussions of socially determined forms of deprivation towards a more general, existentialist dimension, which is most effectively communicated in poems like 'The Hunched', 'Backwaters', 'Supreme Death' and 'The Happier Life'. As he explains, he thought these poems were 'too general to be set in Terry Street'.[25] There is only one poem in this collection, 'Fixed', which overtly identifies a Scottish setting, while the urban images portrayed in 'The River Through the City' or 'Backwaters' may equally refer to any of the northern seaports or industrial towns in Britain. These poems may have been inspired by, or set in, Clydeside, but the absence of place-names (which, as Crawford says, can function as a 'silent dialect'[26]) deprives them of a Scottish identity. We may read Dunn's self-portrait in 'A Dream of Judgement' in *Terry Street* as an illustration of his reluctance to undertake the identity of a Scottish poet. He caricatures himself as James Boswell in a spineless act of flattering Dr Johnson, one of the great canonisers of English

[24] Martin Booth, *British Poetry 1964-1984: Driving Through the Barricades* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 213.
[25] Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 20-21.
[26] Crawford, *Identifying Poets*, 145.

poetry: 'Licking your boots is a small Scotsman/ Who looks like Boswell, but is really me' (*TS*, 51). As is commonly known, although he was fond enough of his native country, Boswell was unable to commit himself to Scotland unconditionally. Dunn has never denied that Philip Larkin recommended *Terry Street* for publication at Faber and Faber, and recalls that even the title of his first collection was suggested by the elder poet.[27] The authoritative figure of Dr Johnson embodies his inferiority complexes in Larkin's shadow and the poem may be a self-ironic reflection on the young poet's apprehension about the reception of his work by the English literary establishment. At the same time, the unobtrusive implication of a tension between his own social background and the supposed exclusiveness of High Culture foreshadows his aspiration in *Barbarians*:

> Quite gently, Pope ushers me out into the hell
> Of forgotten books. Nearby, teasingly,
> In the dustless heaven of the classics,
> There is singing of morals in Latin and Greek.
> (*TS*, 51)

There are few poems in Dunn's work before *Love or Nothing* that exhibit chronological awareness in the Scottish context. One of them is 'Landscape with One Figure', in which the lyrical subject's wish to become a part of the place implies the presence of a future dimension. It is important that, as Anthony Thwaite points out, the 'scene here is not the émigré's Hull or the Humber but his native Scotland, by the Clyde'.[28] The poem introduces the theme of Scottish identity, initially related to the west of Scotland, in a germinal form, which is to be unfolded and ripened in

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[27] Douglas Dunn, *Under the Influence: Douglas Dunn on Philip Larkin* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Library, 1987), 10.
[28] Anthony Thwaite, 'An Allegiance to the Clyde' [a review of *SKP*], *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 October 1981, p. 1125.

the subsequent collections. This involves a personalised attitude, a keen moral sense and the eminent role of the landscape. As a poetic meditation, the poem is reminiscent of John Denham's 'Cooper's Hill' in its structuring. In both poems the speakers describe an object of the landscape first (in Denham's the River Thames, in Dunn's shipyard cranes), to which then they attribute abstract moral qualities, and finally set the objects as an example, a symbol or embodiment of those qualities. Though their idioms are different, the syntax in the conclusions of the two poems is very similar. Both use a conditional phrase in their closing stanzas; in effect, they use the same modal, 'could', expressing wish and ability, and the word 'example' also occurs in both poems. For Denham the Thames is an embodiment of poetic talent:

> O could I flow like thee, and make thy stream
> My great example, as it is my theme!
> Though deep, yet clear, though gentle, yet not dull,
> Strong without rage, without ore-flowing (*sic!*) full.[29]

For Dunn the shipyard cranes, the traditional landmarks of Clydeside, embody an ethical quality. Their chief merit is an allegiance to the landscape, as they identify the place, and, in reverse, themselves become identified with it. The conclusion is an arresting demonstration of a deeply rooted regional consciousness as well as of the inability to be a part of it unconditionally:

> If I could sleep standing, I would wait here
> Forever, become a landmark, something fixed
> For tug crews or seabound passenger to point at,
> An example of being part of a place.
> (*TS*, 55)

[29] John Denham, 'Cooper's Hill', in *The Poetical Works*, ed. by Theodore Howard Banks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928), 63-89 (p. 77).

'Fixed' is another early expression of Dunn's regional identity and it introduces the past dimension in his perception of Scotland. Its composition preceded the publication of *Terry Street* but he did not include it in his first collection.[30] It stands rather solitarily in *The Happier Life*, as it is the only poem here in which Scottish place-names occur: the River Clyde again, Strathclyde, and Renfrewshire, which is his native district. The poem anticipates the lyrical subject's attachment to the place through the reinvention of his childhood and the reliving of his past, as will be developed in more detail in *Love or Nothing*. It also foreshadows the cultural debate between urban centres and 'provincial', rural or semi-rural areas that Dunn enacts in the present tense in *Northlight*. As Raymond Williams argues, the transposition of this division into the past tense has a long tradition in literature, and often involves a sentimental fallacy on the part of the poet:

> We have seen how often an idea of the country is an idea of childhood: not only the local memories, or the ideally shared communal memory, but the feel of childhood: of delighted absorption in our own world, from which, eventually, in the course of growing up, we are distanced and separated, so that it and the world become things we observe. In Wordsworth and Clare, and in many other writers, this structure of feeling is powerfully expressed, and we have seen how often it is converted into illusory ideas of the rural past.[31]

Williams seems to refer to an implied bond between autobiographical writing and public history. He also argues that the poet's idealising approach may easily distort that association. But Dunn cannot be charged with an illusory nostalgia in 'The Happier Life'. In that poem he suggests that it is preposterous to look for happiness either in the capital or in the 'heavy North' (*HL*, 43), and assumes that the existence of an organic community itself is absurd. Jarniewicz points out that the culture of

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[30] First published in: *London Magazine*, 7.5 (1967), 60.
[31] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 297.

Terry Street is 'the continuation of an old folk culture typical of non-urban, rural communities'.[32] Dunn notes that Terry Street was 'more like a village', as it was a self-contained community with 'a status of its own'.[33] Nothing suggests that the same point could not be made in relation to Scottish working-class communities, particularly in Clydeside, where the quick transformation of the countryside must have influenced, at least initially, the development of smaller urban communities. But, as Dunn says, 'Community's a myth' (*HL*, 43). In 'Fixed' he copes with this pressure and this time he falls into the trap of the sentimental fallacy identified by Williams when attributing happiness to the unattainable past of the pastoral Clydeside of his childhood.

'Fixed' contains the two segments that form a binary basis for the construction of self-identity in 'Landscape with One Figure', and which also will be vital in Dunn's later Scottish poems. One of the components is a given entity, something 'fixed', for example an object of the landscape (as the cranes above), a historical event (as World War II in the autobiographical poems of *Love or Nothing*), or the landscape itself, as in the present case. The other is a wilful act, a conscious analysis of the given entity, which is then provided with meaning and function:

> In all its clay and wooden parts,
> A perfect place. For love of them,
> I make it into a local emblem
> Mud and moss-padded banks of Carts…
> (*HL*, 66)

As a consequence, the characteristic movement in Dunn's identifying poems is from the particular to the general, and there is an abiding significance of the particular

[32] Jarniewicz, *The Uses of the Commonplace*, 104.
[33] Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 14.

within the general. It is evinced in the closing lines of the poem, where he connects his own psychological development to the lives, and to the loves and deaths of the succeeding generations that have populated the land. The poem implies again a Wordsworthian attitude, since it represents the lyrical subject's changing self by drawing attention to the illusion of a transformation in the landscape, and thus highlights the relativity of perception. Dunn makes an effort to turn the scene of his youth into an Arcadian environment which is not lost, but perhaps never existed. His effort is justified by his love of the place:

> And though I change, and sunlight's never
> The same again, or woods so dark,
> And active generations cry, 'Forget, forget!'
> These are the fields of love and death,
> And cannot change, were meant to be
> Forever there distortedly,
> The fixed and visionary part of me.
> (*HL*, 67)

Dunn rejects the implied notion of nostalgic identification with the Hull district when he refuses the Terry Street poems to be described as 'slum pastorals'.[34] But, arguably, he embarks on a version of the pastoral in the slightly Larkinesque 'Horses in a Suburban Field' in his first book. In a compressed form, through an allusion to the emblematic tension between a desolate enclosure which still reflects 'an eye for order' and children playing in the grass 'like snakes', the poem seems to contain all the cultural and social inhibitions that will be developed in 'Barbarian Pastorals'. Dunn's elegiac cataloguing of the abandoned things in this suburban waste land also foreshadows the inclusive but backward-looking nature of his spiritual republicanism in 'Galloway Motor Farm' from *St Kilda's Parliament*:

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[34] Douglas Dunn, 'Autumn 1969: *Terry Street*', in *Poetry Book Society: The First Twenty-five Years*, ed. by Eric W. White (London: Poetry Book Society, 1979), 46-47 (p. 47).

> Sad and captured in a towny field,
> The horses peep through the light,
> Step over tin cans, a bicycle frame.
> (*TS*, 43)

The pastoral becomes a central genre in *The Happier Life*, whose title poem is written in rhyming iambic pentameters, which is one of the most conservative verse forms in English literature, while a vocabulary that features words such as 'Utopia', 'Arcadia' and 'Ceres' obviously contributes to the association of the poem with the pastoral convention. In the history of literature, pastoral verse has a long tradition from Theocritus's *Idylls* and Virgil's *Eclogues*. Both classic poets wrote for an educated audience, and while Theocritus praised country life in his native Sicily, Virgil used it as a sophisticated form of social criticism when he imagined a utopian, tranquil existence in Arcadia. Hidden in the distant Peloponnese mountains, Virgil's Arcadia was far removed from political turbulence and social injustices in the Rome of his day. Dunn is clearly conscious of the pastoral's potential for social criticism, and heavily draws on politicised conceptions of the genre. However, he produces a tension out of the proximity of, rather than the distance between, the pastoral and the industrial landscape. Williams suggests that in Britain 'there is a precarious but persistent rural-intellectual radicalism: genuinely and actively hostile to industrialism and capitalism; opposed to commercialism and to the exploitation of environment; attached to country ways and feelings'.[35] This conflict, which probably culminates in *Northlight*, has an abiding significance in Dunn's poetry. Inasmuch as he denounces industrialism as a seemingly irreversible and damaging effect, here the rural-urban debate carries some of the weight of Edwin Muir's negative teleology, though the

[35] Williams, *The Country and the City*, 36.

apocalyptic mood that often characterises the great Scottish modernist is missing from Dunn's writing at this early stage. Dunn remembers his 'roots in messily bucolic Renfrewshire',[36] and this irony reveals a certain restraint in his attitude towards the place. The rural environment of his childhood and youth was threatened by the constant expansion of Glasgow. As with Muir, his life in the city (in Glasgow and then Hull) planted in him a scepticism about the possibility of the evolution of organic communities among urban conditions. So, when in 'A Faber Melancholy' he says, 'I think I'm Horace with a view/ Of the gasworks' (*HL*, 58), Dunn extends the topicality of his social criticism to potentially include a philosophical reflection on the decline of history: 'There are gradual but disastrous happenings/ That prevent language' (*HL*, 57).

'The Garden', the opening poem in *The Happier Life*, written in iambic pentameter-based unrhymed quatrains, is an anti-pastoral inasmuch as it describes the preservation of a garden in its untamed, wild and autonomous harmony: 'For gardens need nothing specially/ And tall weeds are better weeds' (*HL*, 11). With a vocabulary that features items such as 'rose', 'culture', 'lawn', 'angry' and 'classicism', the poem foreshadows Dunn's later concerns in 'Barbarian Pastorals', whereas his botanical sensibility, which probably owes much to his rural upbringing, prefigures his later poems about gardening, most notably 'Garden Hints' in *Dante's Drum-kit.* Going against the grain in a British society that is obsessed with gardening, here Dunn reflects on a more casual approach to horticulture. The result of his apparent neglect is an artistic and friendly chaos, a 'random perfection' (*HL*, 12), which is a haven for the visiting creatures. The poem implies an antagonism between nature and culture that has far-reaching and very tangible consequences.

[36] Douglas Dunn, 'Living out of London – VIII', *London Magazine*, 19 (1979), 71-79 (p. 73).

Dunn hints at this tension by briefly quoting the opinion of the opponent fellow-residents: 'animal friendships/ Might add beguiling eccentricity// To this oppositional horticulture/ That upsets, the neighbours say, all their decent/ Trimmings' (*HL*, 12). It can be an evidence of Dunn's basic predisposition as a nature poet that, after an extended digression to polemical verse in *Barbarians* and *St Kilda's Parliament*, he will return to nature for consolation in *Elegies* and *The Year's Afternoon*, and for inspiration in *Northlight*. Cultural conflicts have their deep roots in class-based prejudices and often provoke indignation in those who are discriminated against:

> And here the wave shapes of the wild thorn
> Are as angry as cultured brothers growing
> In a ground nervous with learned tending.
> (*HL*, 11)

As 'Barbarian Pastorals' later demonstrates, class antagonisms often surpass the concerns of nationality, but Dunn inserts a small reference to his Scottish national background in the image of the thistle. The idea that the untamed garden promises a new beginning and the liberation of raw energies anticipate the working-class poet's supposed potential for becoming the innovator of an exhausted tradition: 'something fresh/ Might happen here, unworked and gladdening' (*HL*, 11). However, that now he has an opportunity to use a lawnmower in his garden symbolically confirms his separation from working-class culture, which, in metaphorical terms, is represented by the barrier of the window-pane in *Terry Street*. The fact that the principal audience of the working-class poet comes from the educated middle classes, further complicates the often insecure, in-between cultural position of Dunn, who in his

poems repeatedly gives voice to his reservations about the political uses of literature.[37]

In *Terry Street* and *The Happier Life* there are two more recognisably Scottish poems, 'Ships' and 'Celtica', and both are written in the present tense. It is not only the place-names (Clyde and Ayrshire) that identify 'Ships' as a Scottish poem, but also the significant allusion to the transformation in the historical role of Glasgow. Once a gate to the open world, the seaport has become the symbol of confinement and cheap existence closed off from opportunities:

> Then the boys go out, down streets that look on water.
> They say, "I could have gone with them,"
> A thousand times to themselves in the glass cafés,
> Over their American soft drinks, into their empty hands.
> (*TS*, 59)

'Celtica', the companion piece of an uncollected early poem called 'Anglo Saxon',[38] is an Ossianic exercise into which Dunn merges references to modern technological living: 'They should sit/ Beside waterfalls, many miles from traffic/ And Saxon eyes' (*HL*, 30). Here he portrays an indefinite woman, a lyrical embodiment of the Scottish racial characteristics of red hair and white skin: 'A nation's beauty, like a flame/ Lasting on charred wood' (*HL*, 30). Although it is written in the present tense, 'Celtica' also implies a past tense by inquiring into the origins of a nation, a theme to which he returns in *Northlight*: 'Where is the blood, the beginning?' (*HL*, 30). And while love and womanhood have a supernatural dimension in Dunn's poetry almost from the start, with *Elegies* it becomes indisputable that in his imagination there

[37] Later Dunn writes about the ambiguous cultural position of the working-class writer: 'His work, in truth, is directed at an audience who do not receive it; instead, it is received by an audience largely composed of those he is against. That is the peculiar literary sadness of a working-class writer'. In: Douglas Dunn, 'Editorial: The Grudge', *Stand*, 16.4 (1975), 4-6 (p. 5).
[38] Douglas Dunn, 'Anglo-Saxon', *The Listener*, 27 April 1967, p. 550.

exists a clandestine alliance between femininity and sensitivity to spiritual things. His conception of European history as a female figure in *Europa's Lover* is probably influenced by the same consideration as when he imagines Scotland's historical spirit as a woman in 'Celtica', or later in 'Witch-girl' in *St Kilda's Parliament*. A gentle understanding of femininity remains a definitive ingredient in his attitude to history, place and nationality in *Northlight*, as the intimacy of married love and public solidarity merge irrevocably in 'At Falkland Palace', the opening poem of that collection.

Dunn explains the widening of the Scottish horizon in his work as a linear process stretching from *Terry Street* to *Barbarians*:

> By the winter of 1974 [...] I began to realize I had written a number of poems which, to my mind, suggested a continuity, or a subject I had been opening up to myself without knowing too much about it. 'Ships', 'Landscape with One Figure' in *Terry Street*; 'Guerillas' in *The Happier Life*; and 'Clydesiders' and 'The Competition' in *Love or Nothing*, offered me the attitudes of *Barbarians*.[39]

In retrospect, George Szirtes suggests that the 'passage from *Terry Street* to *St Kilda's Parliament* is a journey home for Dunn'.[40] Sean O'Brien observes a similar development wherein a 'constellation of themes' that is materialised in *Love or Nothing* shows the way to *Barbarians*.[41] However, what O'Brien identifies as a 'placing of the self in history'[42] in *Love or Nothing* is, more precisely, a placing of the self in Scottish history. Overt representations of public, either national or local, history are absent from Dunn's poetry before *Barbarians*, but the evocation of a

[39] King, 'Three New Poets', 224-25.
[40] George Szirtes, 'A Natural Elegist' [a review of *SP*], *Poetry Review*, 76.4 (1986), 50-1 (p. 50).
[41] Sean O'Brien, 'Dunn and Politics', in *Reading Douglas Dunn*, ed. by Robert Crawford and David Kinloch, Modern Scottish Writers Series (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 66-79 (p. 71).
[42] Ibid., 72.

personal past through autobiography in his 1974 collection practically entails the positioning of the self in collective history. The autobiographical element not only adds a new, subjective dimension to his early work, but also provides it with a personal history, which, if it is contextualised in public history, may establish a link between the lyrical self and the community.

In three consecutive autobiographical poems in *Love or Nothing*, 'White Fields', 'The Competition' and 'Boys With Coats', the fears and nightmares, humiliations and frustrations of the poet's childhood self are narrated against the historical background of a post-war rural Clydeside. Dunn recalls his native parish in the shadow of a continuously expanding industrial Glasgow:

> At that time Inchinnan was the first countryside west of Glasgow – farms, a village, a Western SMT bus garage and the India Tyre factory where my father worked. The Clyde shipyards were visible, and much other industry on the north bank. It was a busy river in those days. And there were woods, defunct quarries, streams, ponds, lanes, reed beds by the river and hulks on inshore sandbanks. [...] because it was in sight of heavy industry and close to Glasgow, I sensed the vulnerability of the place – *time past, time present, and time to come*.[43]

These narratives of failures are structured around the common motif of a model aeroplane, which serves as a vehicle for the emotions and intentions of the child. In 'White Fields' the story highlights an analogy between the toy, with which the child played war games, and a real plane, which recalls the terrors of the war. In 'The Competition' the same toy is placed in the focus of social tensions, and provides an occasion for Dunn to reflect on the superficiality of social equality in a society that is proud of its uninterrupted history of democratic government. Having given his pocket money and model plane to a boy without a coat, the child realises the futility

[43] Nicholson, 'Dimensions of the Sentient', 184-85. Emphasis added.

of his gesture, and feels 'radical that my lost Hurricane/ Solved nothing' (*LN*, 35). The identical opening of 'The Competition' and 'Boys With Coats' ('When I was ten...') also suggests a common identity between the two poems. Both poems are about childhood's perceptions of social differences tainted by a sense of existing between social extremes. What Dave Smith identifies as 'childhood wounds'[44] in the latter piece is probably more than that: these autobiographical poems record early lessons in social inequality.

In three poems related to his sea experience ('Unlucky Mariners', 'The Scar' and 'Sailing with the Fleet') Dunn extends the chronological dimensions of personal history in various directions. 'The Scar' establishes a link with the past by telling the story of an accident in the first person singular, but the diction is so stylised that the actual event becomes hardly recognisable. The poem's abstract quality and its loosely connected associative details give the impression of a faint memory. 'Sailing with the Fleet' relates to the period in his life when he was in the Sea Cadet Corps as a schoolboy. The poem suggests an apparently irreconcilable tension between the past and the present through the contrasting images of 'gloved Cadets' among 'hulk veterans', and in the 'unheroic trips' of the boys compared to earlier wartime missions of the ship (*LN*, 29), but it remains an important part of Dunn's attempt to cast anchor in public history. 'Unlucky Mariners' points in two directions at once (the past and the future), and represents various voices. Three Scottish mariners recall their unfortunate memories of naval voyages and their speeches interweave the persona's remembering his own second-hand sea experiences. The recollection of an Ancient Mariner-like episode stands in the centre of the poem, with six stanzas preceding and six following it:

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[44] Dave Smith, 'Them and Uz', 85.

> Once, on a raft on a lagoon
> Of Renfrewshire's Clyde,
> An old man waved from his freighter;
> He had nothing to do but wave to me,
> And I thought, 'I'll go to sea.'
> (*LN*, 25)

The persona's interior monologue is regularly interspersed by the three mariners' loud contemplations, one at the beginning of the poem, one in the middle and one at the end, and all that leads to a disenchanted and ironic conclusion. The notes of quiet melancholy and nostalgia also filter in the ending, as adventures on the sea are a thing of the past, the shipyards are desolate and the mariners are the ghosts of their old selves:

> Wrecks of many seas,
> Here by the silent shipyards
> Of the shore, ghosts of nuts and bolts
> Toast your epiphanies
> In the transparent grave of the fish!
> (*LN*, 26)

If these autobiographically inspired poems represent a link with the past, then the world of 'Renfrewshire Traveller' is the present. Dunn's recollection of a train journey home to his native place combines a description of the South Western Scottish landscape with meditation. He explains the background of the poem:

> The poem evokes a visit. In those days the train I caught at Leeds went up through Kilmarnock to Glasgow Central. [...] There were always people on the train who looked as if they were experiencing the same euphoric misery, wondering who they were, holding off sentimental junk about "exile" but unwilling to think of themselves as visitors. I remember speaking to someone who seemed to be suffering from a particularly bad case of return-itis. He

> was full of sentimentality and undeserved pride, with the result that I wrote the poem.[45]

A sense of the past also infiltrates the monologue, as he again describes a Wordsworthian revisiting of the scene of youth, though this time with a different outcome. Instead of recovering a harmonic existence, or an organic community, what he finds there is only to be repudiated by the incantation: 'not this'. Dunn's approaching his home land provokes a self-evaluation in relation to Scotland. His conclusion is disillusioned, comfortless and self-deprecatory:

> Have I come back?
> I am Scots, a tartan tin box
> Of shortbread in a delicatessen of cheddars
>
> And southern specialties.
> I am full of poison.
> Each crumb of me is a death.
> (*LN*, 22)

In the first half of the poem the speaker's repeating of the incredulous question 'Have I come back?' indicates his initial reluctance, which develops into an absolute refusal by the last stanzas:

> Not this. Not this
> Slow afright over rails,
> This ache in a buffet of empty beer-cans.
>
> This wiping of windows to see a city
> Rise from its brilliant lack,
> Its fixtures in transparent butter.
>
> Not this visitor
> To a place of relatives,
> A place of names.
> (*LN*, 23)

[45] Nicholson, 'Dimensions of the Sentient', 190.

The notion of being a stranger at home is a significant presence in the work of Dunn's Irish contemporaries. Seamus Heaney's 'Exposure' and Derek Mahon's 'Afterlives' (discussed in Chapter Four in more detail) reflect on the émigré's predicament and an inability to identify with the general situation in Northern Ireland. As Neil Corcoran suggests, Mahon has absorbed the 'visitor's attitude' from the poetry of MacNeice, whose 'partly outsider status [...] seems to Mahon a liberation rather than a limitation, one that he, as a Belfast Protestant educated in Trinity College, Dublin, but spending long periods of his life outside Ireland, clearly feels sympathetic towards'.[46] Corcoran also points out the significance of other outsiders, such as Marilyn Monroe, Thomas De Quincey and François Villon, in Mahon's work. In a similar way, Dunn has been subject to the influences of great (spiritual) exiles like Robert Louis Stevenson, Byron or Rimbaud. But, unlike his Irish contemporaries, Dunn does not consider the predicament of the exile as a potential site of artistic liberation. From the very beginning of his career there has been a desire in him to write about Scotland and his inability to do so finds its way into his poetry in the form of the sublimation of the Scottish subject matter (in the 'Terry Street' sequence) or in the form of nostalgia, frustration and irony (in 'Landscape with One Figure', 'Renfrewshire Traveller' and 'The Estuarial Republic'). 'I think my main commitment to place is to the place I come from; to some extent my expression of Terry Street was a surrogate, a substitute, for my commitment to somewhere else', he said in an interview.[47] At this early stage, what Dunn offers in 'Renfrewshire Traveller' is anything but a pleasant interpretation of

[46] Neil Corcoran, *English Poetry Since 1940*, Longman Literatures in English Series (London: Longman, 1993), 187-88.
[47] Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 16.

Scottish identity. Although questioning and repudiation are a part of his view of Scotland (as it should be in any poetry that is also a channel of social criticism), it is only one of the several perspectives from which he looks at Scottish culture. He may be uneasy about the metropolis ('I don't like Glasgow. Never have done, never will do'[48]) but he always shows deep affection for his narrower home in Clydeside. 'Renfrewshire Traveller' is one of his earliest poems that reflects on versions of Scottish identity, and is rooted in the history of a given community. Bernard O'Donoghue observed that in contrast with *Terry Street*, where the recording poet has an existence mainly in the present moment, this poem provides Dunn's early work with an 'extra dimension' through introducing a past tense.[49] It is not before the mid-1980s, in the poems of *Northlight*, that Dunn eventually resolves the idea of being a visitor at home. The above mentioned 'At Falkland Palace' is the paradigmatic expression of his newly found ability of unconditional identification with the landscape and the history of Fife, though notably, even in *Northlight*, his approach to the political past of the Scottish nation is not unproblematic, and the motif of emigration remains central to his subsequent books.

'Clydesiders' lends a future dimension to Dunn's perception of Scotland in his early work. Identification with a place and a people is not only defined by what a poet accepts as his or her historical and cultural heritage, but also implies taking attitudes towards it. In 'Clydesiders' he fulfils that criterion in two steps. First, as I note above, he identifies the impressions the landscape has made on him, and then turns them into a moral commitment as well as an *ars poetica* with which he is ready to align himself:

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[48] O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil', 30.
[49] O'Donoghue, 'Moving Towards a Vernacular of Compassion', 44.

My poems should be Clyde-built, crude and sure,
With images of those dole-deployed
To honour the indomitable Reds,
Clydesiders of slant steel and angled cranes;
A poetry of nuts and bolts, born, bred,
Embattled by the Clyde, tight and impure.
(*LN*, 37)

In retrospect, he has been unable to achieve that 'crude and sure', and 'tight and impure' poetry he endorses here. What Sanders describes as Dunn's 'intoxication with words'[50] leads to an extensive and sophisticated vocabulary, and represents a very different sensibility altogether. The oppositional dynamic of representing 'provincial' or lower-class concerns in high forms seems to be a lasting inspiration in his poetic career, and becomes especially powerful in *Barbarians*. Although he sympathises with a simple and unornamented aesthetic ideal that the working-class environment suggests here, Dunn discloses a basically different poetic taste and approach. The closing stanza in 'Clydesiders' reveals that what appears to be determination is rather the articulation of a psychological imprint:

My footprints tread a rug of settled sawdust,
The carpentering corner of a Yard.
I made these marks, have gone back to London,
No victim of my place, but mad for it.
A shower of rain, my footprints melt and run.
They'll follow to my life. I know they must.
(*LN*, 37)

David Kennedy criticises Corcoran's account of Harrison's and Dunn's poetry in *English Poetry Since 1940* for failing to acknowledge the gender issues implicit in the contemporary predicament of a male poet of working-class origin. Kennedy argues that 'the anxieties over what might be termed class performativity

[50] John Sanders, 'Davie, MacCaig and Dunn' [a review of *LN*], *Lines Review*, 54 (1975), 42-50 (p. 49).

are inextricable from anxieties over gender performativity'.[51] He suggests that the conflict between these 'performativities' originates in anxieties felt over whether literature is '"real" work for "real" men'.[52] This way, Kennedy says, the poets 'find themselves translated not only out of their class but out of their expected gender roles', which adds an 'extra dimension' to their difference.[53] Kennedy draws attention to perceptions of gender roles in 'The Clothes Pit' and especially in 'Young Women in Rollers', in which the Terry Street girls ridicule the poet persona's effeminacy, manifest in the fact that he occupies the feminine space of indoors during the day, behind the protective window, surrounded by books:

> This time they see me at my window, among books,
> A specimen under glass, being protected,
> And laugh at me watching them.
> They minuet to Mozart playing loudly
>
> On the afternoon Third. They mock me thus,
> They mime my softness.
> (*TS*, 29)

Kennedy proposes the ideal of a Clyde-built (masculine, physical) quality of poetry represented in 'Clydesiders' as Dunn's solution to restore masculinity in class-based perceptions of, and prejudices against, cultural activity. He also suggests that Dunn establishes the poet's identity in the context of working-class culture by 'removing any hints of effeminacy from poetry'.[54] However, if Kennedy reprimands Corcoran for ignoring gender issues, then he himself fails to recognise Dunn's positive attitude to the feminine, which helps him promote a parallel, gentle and domestic, sensibility

[51] David Kennedy, '*"What does the fairy DO?"*: The staging of antithetical masculine styles in the poetry of Tony Harrison and Douglas Dunn', *Textual Practice*, 14.1 (2000), 115-36 (p. 115).
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 131.

in the contemporary milieu of Scottish literature that is often seen as very masculine. This attitude also incorporates the perception of poetic imagination as a feminine impulse, as is obvious from Dunn's frequent references to the Muses. Moreover, Kennedy disregards more recent developments in Dunn's apprehension of gender roles, including, most notably, *Elegies*, but also *Europa's Lover*, *Northlight*, *Dante's Drum-kit* and *The Donkey's Ears*. By implying womanhood's close association with nature, inspiration, spirituality and even nationality, these later volumes further problematise attitudes to femininity in Dunn's poetry.

'Clydesiders' has also contributed to Dunn's categorisation as a socialist poet, and, in his review of the subsequent *Barbarians*, Blake Morrison even described him as 'Red Dunn'.[55] His interest in industrial Clydeside, together with a personal attachment to the region as acknowledged in his early work, has done much to consolidate this view. In various interviews, Dunn has made attempts to modify this image. Although he mentions that his grandfather's Socialist conviction has always been appealing to him, in an effort to fuse his aesthetic obligations with his background he maintains that what he associates with Clydeside is poetic discipline and moral responsibility:

> Where I come from is a region noted for work, whether you take the industrial history of Clydeside, or its agricultural life [...]. Anything jerry-built or done in a hurry not only looks like it, but, in the best traditions of the west of Scotland, is an affront to its maker's self-respect. [...] I consider it an obligation to make my poems as best I can, in the belief that the people I come from expect the best I can give them.[56]

In 'Clydesiders', then, the adjective 'Clyde-built' refers to the aesthetic quality rather than to the political character of Dunn's poetry. He identifies this motivation as his

[55] Blake Morrison, 'Over the Garden Wall' [a review of *B*], *New Statesman*, 11 May 1979, p. 690.
[56] King, 'Three New Poets', 226.

'notional craftsmanship'.[57] Briefly, it means the worker's obligation of honesty and self-esteem through his craft, which, particularly in that period, Dunn liked to see as a definitive element of his poetic sensibility. In his understanding, 'Clydesidism' is stripped of its specific political references to the Old Left, which he described as a 'mythical politics'.[58] In his history of Scotland, Michael Lynch doubts that Clydesidism was ever a convincing political factor: 'The legend of "Red Clydeside" was born of the efforts made, both by a small band of socialist enthusiasts and by a panicky wartime coalition government, to link together different episodes – industrial disputes, rent strikes and demonstrations – into a revolutionary conspiracy'.[59] Dunn never refers to this background as a politically charged motivation in his formal or stylistic considerations: it is debatable to what extent *Elegies*, probably his most strictly composed work beside *The Donkey's Ears*, could have been written on behalf of, or in mind with, those 'indomitable Reds'. In his further career the personalised and abstract quality of his version of Clydesidism becomes even more apparent. The concept may be associated with the poetic interiorisation of what originally was a political abstraction through removing it from its primary context rather than be seen as a first-hand expression of ideological loyalty to that abstraction. By the early 1980s, he successfully melds the worker's virtue of craftsmanship into the formal sensibility of the cultured poet. Formalism, which Dunn exploits as a potential point of entry into High Culture in 'Barbarian Pastorals', becomes a self-supporting principle in *Europa's Lover* and *Elegies*. Poetic excellence, which is an important ambition in his early poetry, becomes later a natural part of his mode of expression. His confident use of a great variety of forms and his polished poetic language will later contribute to his

[57] Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 25.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 424.

perception as an international poet, who will revise this newly attained cultural position from the perspective of his native Scotland.

While in 'Clydesiders' Dunn absorbs what he perceives as a regional characteristic into his developing version of Scottish cultural identity in the form of an aesthetic ambition, in 'Realisms' he inquires into the predicament of the Scottish poet in more general terms. It is intended to be a central text in *Love or Nothing*, as its allusion to the title of the collection suggests. It is directly followed by, and shares the stanza pattern with, 'Renfrewshire Traveller'. Dunn dedicated 'Realisms' to Derek Mahon, whom he regards as a kindred spirit.[60] Sean O'Brien points out that the verse form Dunn employs here is the Irish poet's 'patented triplet form'.[61] The metrical parallel is probably a deliberate gesture on the part of Dunn, though one has to bear in mind that it was a popular and widely used form in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the British Isles. We may encounter this form in the poetry of Craig Raine, Hugo Williams, Seamus Heaney, Medbh McGuckian and Christopher Reid, among others. Dunn draws an extended parallel between the situation of the Northern-Irish and Scottish poets:

> We puff our alphabets
> Back to the oratorical soup
>
> Of Ireland, Scotland,
> To a thousand stabs in the back,
> The inhabitants of opposition.
>
> Our cities of shipyards,
> Belfast, Glasgow, fervent closures
> Of protestantism dispensed with –
>
> We never escape them…
> (*LN*, 20)

[60] Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 32-33.
[61] Sean O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1998), 75.

Although the analogy between the situations in Belfast and Glasgow is not entirely earned, what is common between Mahon and Dunn is that both refuse to submit their poetry to political ideologies. 'I am against most revolutions,/ All conformities', Dunn writes (*LN*, 20). Since a simplistic political statement is alien to his temperament and poetic convictions, the only solution seems to be an ideal of introvert lyrical poetry, a 'surrender/ To the language' (*LN*, 20). 'Realisms' can also be read as an early expression of what later develops into a central problem in his poetry and critical writing, a tension between the perceptions of poetry as an independent creative act and as a socially and politically responsible art form. Although he likes to see himself as working between these opposites throughout his career, it seems to me that right at this initial phase he gives away his lyrical temperament. The poem leads from the either/or question in the book's title to inclusiveness, which provides for both sentiments towards Scotland, love *and* nothing. 'Realisms' works the contemplation of a particular experience towards a universal conclusion. The closing stanzas reveal that for him Scottishness is probably more than a form of social determination (as we saw in 'Clydesiders'), or even more than a question of identity (as represented in 'Renfrewshire Traveller'), but he regards it as an existential predicament. The movement of the poem leads the reader from the 'paper efficiencies' of poetry (*LN*, 19) to epiphany, to the 'existential clarity/ Of love and nothing' (*LN*, 21). Moreover, 'Realisms' exhibits in a germinal form what will later develop into an elegiac perception of Scotland, which transposes the country's existence into the realm of feelings.

It may seem to contradict my hypothesis in this chapter that probably the most widely discussed poem in *Love or Nothing* is called 'I Am a Cameraman'. But

it is exactly this poem which indicates that the photographic representation of social problems will cease to be the central motivation in Dunn's poetry. In 'I Am a Cameraman' he recognises the limitations implied in the intentional gap of photographic poetry:

> They suffer, and I catch only the surface.
> The rest is inexpressible, beyond
> What can be recorded. You can't be them.
> (*LN*, 41)

The poem associates itself with W. H. Auden's 'I Am Not a Camera', which states in its epigraph: 'Photographable life is always either trivial or already sterilised'.[62] Dunn's poem clearly echoes Auden's concise and matter-of-fact style if in a less epigrammatic manner. Auden considers the implied distance between subject and object in the making of a photograph:

> To call our sight Vision
> Implies that, to us,
> All objects are subjects.[63]

As Jarniewicz reminds us, the title of Dunn's poem alludes to Christopher Isherwood's famous sentence from *A Berlin Diary*: 'I am a camera with its shutters open, quite passive, recording, not thinking'. The Polish critic also draws attention to the 'passive act of watching' involved in Dunn's realism.[64] Certainly, especially in *Terry Street*, the visual image assumes a greater importance than the representation of voices. But documentary poetry is not passive inasmuch as it is the consequence of the poet's

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[62] W. H. Auden, 'I Am Not a Camera', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 840-41 (p. 840).
[63] Ibid.
[64] Jarniewicz, *The Uses of the Commonplace*, 98.

deliberate choice, and also involves active procedures such as selecting, arranging and editing. Jarniewicz observes that here Dunn's 'critique of realism as a method of approaching life is grounded not on aesthetic assumptions and judgements, but on ethical and social considerations'.[65] Certainly, the poem leaves room for this ethically based reading, as Dunn expresses his doubts about the conventionally accepted presence of an underwritten truth value in documentary photography: 'Truth is known only to its victims/ All else is photographs' (*LN*, 41). He considers realism to be insincere not only because it rules out the possibility of personal involvement, as Jarniewicz assumes, but also because he sees it as a form of indiscretion, and his Presbyterian upbringing has planted in him a very keen sense of reticence: 'I robbed them of their privacy' (*LN*, 41). In Jarniewicz's opinion, 'Realism [...] is contested because of its failure to engage the artist in what he is depicting, to make him empathize and act'.[66] But, arguably, the assumed inadequacy of realism goes back to the technical restrictions of the photographic method Dunn applies. 'Film has no words of its own', he says in the poem (*LN*, 41), and this may equally refer to the centrality of visual impressions in documentary poetry and to the limitations that the photographic technique imposes on creative imagination. As pointed out, the photographic method does not normally relate to the representation of voices, and therefore it rarely involves the lyrical self and a sense of community with the poet's subjects: 'It is a silent waste of things happening/ Without us' (*LN*, 41).

Bernard O'Donoghue suggests that Dunn's 'inclination to write in the surrealist vein' can be traced back to the second half of *Love or Nothing*.[67] The Irish poet-critic contends that, as opposed to the typical qualities of Martian poetry, Dunn's surrealism

[65] Ibid., 96.
[66] Ibid.
[67] O'Donoghue, 'Moving Towards a Vernacular of Compassion', 45.

is 'evasive', and functions mainly as 'a kind of holiday from responsibility'.[68] Dunn may use surrealism for such purposes in poems like 'Ars Poetica', 'The Concert', which is dedicated to Peter Porter, or 'The White Poet', a homage to Jules Laforgue. But surrealism becomes a very important stylistic ingredient in the expression of his social concerns in *St Kilda's Parliament* and *Europa's Lover*, as I shall demonstrate in the following chapter. The origins of the social uses of surrealism can be found in *Love or Nothing*, in poems like 'Caledonian Moonlight' and 'The Estuarial Republic'. The surrealist mode may at times involve irony as in the latter poem, but, typically, a sense of nostalgia or belatedness characterises these pieces. Inasmuch as it implies spiritual correspondence between nature and love, Dunn's dreamlike, pensive lyricism in 'Caledonian Moonlight' points forward to the stylistic concerns of *Elegies*. 'The Estuarial Republic' brings up a public context, but, just as earlier in 'The River Through the City' and 'Backwaters', it remains ambiguous whether the estuary described here can be related to his native Clydeside or to the Humber at Hull, his adopted home for nearly two decades. While the image of 'saltmarsh on the horizon' (*LN*, 61) suggests a flat land, which is typical of the latter place, the allusion to the proud and apparently futile military tradition of the community speaks of the poem's Scottish identity. Sean O'Brien guides our attention to the 'willed savagery' in this poem, which, in his opinion, reflects the always present 'difficulty of naming' that also characterises 'Renfrewshire Traveller' as well as Dunn's autobiographical poems in *Love or Nothing*.[69] Dunn successfully combines the impression of being a reluctant visitor with an ironic, and at times even sarcastic, description of one of his imagined communities:

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[68] Ibid.
[69] O'Brien, 'Dunn and Politics', 72.

'Come when you can
But first drop us a line.
You won't like all of it,
But the danger is fun,
And everyone visits, at least once.'
(*LN*, 63)

To sum up, in contrast with the incomplete temporal horizons of Scottish subject matters in Dunn's first two books, *Love or Nothing* displays a consistent chronological awareness. The presence of all the three dimensions of the time scale provides this collection with a personal and public historical context. He gives expression to his view of the Scottish landscape and the Scottish past in a range of autobiographical, descriptive and meditative poems, which take the place of the photographic technique. Compared to the centrality of visual impressions in *Terry Street*, the representation of voices comes to be more significant in his third book. His diction becomes livelier as opposed to the relatively static and nominal style that dominates *Terry Street*. Beside affirmatives, other rhetorical forms, such as interrogatives, apostrophe and negation, begin to play a more important role in his language in *Love or Nothing*. The most obvious landmark of this stylistic transformation is probably 'Renfrewshire Traveller', an inner monologue of self-interrogation and psychological resistance, whereas Dunn's landscapes start to acquire identifiable Scottish characteristics, and place-names also find their ways into the poems in an increasing number. Personal history and the sentiments implied in the retrospective viewpoint of autobiography connect him to Clydeside, his home territory on the west coast of Scotland, which also serves as a basis for his fictional communities at this stage. On the whole, in *Love or Nothing* Dunn leaves behind the obstructions involved in the limited cognitive matrix of documentary poetry and in the subsequent *Barbarians* he will initiate a dialogic relationship between self and other.

# Chapter Two

# The Undeclared Republic

## From observation to dialogue: Class and nationality in *Barbarians*, *St Kilda's Parliament* and *Europa's Lover*

Dialogue as an epistemological strategy establishes a significant link between *Barbarians*, *St Kilda's Parliament* and *Europa's Lover*. Dunn's early poetry is based on the Cartesian pattern of understanding, in which the subject gains knowledge of the other through observation. In *Terry Street* the shortcoming of this cognitive matrix is metaphorically represented by the window-pane, which acts as a barrier of communication, and since observation allows of imperfect understanding, Dunn relies on subjective impressions to supplement the experience from his own imagination. This method leads to an impressionistic quality in 'Men of Terry Street', 'On Roofs of Terry Street', 'Winter' and 'Silences', whereas in 'After Closing Time' and 'A Death in Terry Street' it creates a surrealistic atmosphere. *Love or Nothing* foreshadows a shift towards a different kind of approach and in the subsequent books Dunn relies on dialogues with, rather than observation of, the other so as to establish reciprocity between aspects of Scottish history and tradition, and between opposing social forces. What makes poetic understanding possible is otherness itself, and so what was an obstruction in *Terry Street* now becomes a basic condition of understanding. Beside generic effects such as the growing importance of the dramatic monologue and the mask lyric, another significant consequence is that intertextuality and other forms of utilising or travestying tradition come into the focus of his attention in this period. Formality gains a more substantial prominence from *Barbarians* on. A further development is the growing importance of lyricism

and elegiac sensibility, but both will become pivotal in *Elegies*. In this sense *Barbarians*, *St Kilda's Parliament* and *Europa's Lover* represent a transition between subjective photography in Dunn's early work and a kind of subjectivism that coincides with the foregrounding of formal concerns in his later poetry.

In the 1990s a keen awareness unfolded that Bakhtin could provide a valuable context for interpreting the heterogeneous nature of Scottish culture. In his *Identifying Poets*, Crawford recognised the relevance of dialogism to the critical analysis of the history of Scotland's multilingual literature, whereas in 'Bakhtin and Scotlands' he tried to raise an awareness of the significance of Bakhtinian thought for developing new approaches in Scottish education.[1] More recently, Roderick Watson suggested that 'Bakhtin's concepts of monological, dialogical and polyphonic tendencies provide valuable terms for discussing the fluid nature of literary and linguistic processes and power relationships without evoking problematic and implicitly essentialist questions of "Scottishness" or "Englishness"'.[2] The application of dialogism to Dunn's work is not a novelty. Ian Gregson looked at the ontological relationship between self and other, which involves not only a verbal interplay between different perspectives, but also implies the legitimacy of pluralist viewpoints in literature as well as in society, in the poetry of Dunn.[3] Gregson also underlined the sociolinguistic consequences and their political implications in Dunn's perspectivic representations. Cairns Craig argues that Dunn continues dialogues with tradition, only the 'dialogue with realism' in his

[1] Robert Crawford, 'Bakhtin and Scotlands', *Scotlands*, 1 (1994), 45-55.
[2] Roderick Watson, 'Postcolonial Subjects? Language, Narrative Authority and Class in Contemporary Scottish Culture', *The European English Messenger*, 7.1 (1998), 21-31 (p. 24).
[3] Ian Gregson, '"There are many worlds": The "Dialogic" in *Terry Street* and After', in *Reading Douglas Dunn*, ed. by Robert Crawford and David Kinloch, Modern Scottish Writers Series (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 17-31.

earlier poetry has developed into a 'dialogue with formalism' by the late 1980s.[4] Crawford also 'predicts' that Bakhtin will become 'the dominant' and 'the most attractive' theorist in the short term.[5] But, rather than promoting a Scottish Bakhtinist discourse, here I assume the possibility of the destabilisation of this theory in Scottish criticism. I shall draw attention to the usefulness of Jaussian hermeneutics: another essentially dialogic theory which shares many common features with Bakhtinism, and which may help locate reciprocity in the spaces between texts and readers, and texts and other texts. Finally, I shall touch upon the ways in which Jauss may be relevant to an analysis of the struggles between otherness and acclimatisation, dialogue and resistance, or heterogeneity and normalisation in contemporary Scottish writing, and particularly in Dunn's poetry.

Jauss defines the general aim of historical hermeneutics as to 'include the receiver of literature in the dialogue maintained by its producers, to recognize his participation in the constitution of meaning, and to ask how the work of art can be something closed on itself and, at the same time, open to interpretation'.[6] Jauss establishes the difference between the receiver of literature and the aesthetic object as the prerequisite for understanding, and what he has to say about the dialogic nature of literary understanding is equally valid for the class-based dialogues with poetic tradition in the work of Dunn:

> Just as the producer is always a recipient as soon as he begins to write, so too the interpreter must bring himself into play as reader when he wishes to enter into a dialogue with the literary tradition. It is not merely the conversational partners that constitute a dialogue. The willingness to recognize and acknowledge the other in his otherness also plays a role. This is all the more

[4] Craig, 'From the Lost Ground', 370.
[5] Crawford, *Identifying Poets*, 9.
[6] Hans Robert Jauss, *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding*, ed. and trans. by Michael Hays, Theory and History of Literature Series, 68 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 211.

> true when the other is represented by a text that no longer speaks directly to us. Literary understanding first becomes dialogic when the alterity of the text is sought out and acknowledged before the horizon of one's own expectations – with the result that instead of attempting a naive fusion of horizons, one's own expectations will be corrected and expanded through the experience of the other.[7]

In *Barbarians* Dunn aims to establish a lyrical self through initiating dialogues with the socially or culturally other represented as a text, discourse or characteristic form of speech. It is an identifiably Scottish self in 'The Student – Of Renfrewshire, 1820', a dramatic monologue which is a part of Dunn's class-conscious rewriting of Scottish social history. He draws attention to the difference between his working-class background and his newly attained cultural position as a reviewer for the *New Statesman* in the inspiration of the poem:

> My English teacher [...] digressed for an hour or so on the riots in Paisley in 1820 – aftermath of Peterloo. [...] Years later, in 1970, I reviewed Ellis's and Mac a Ghobhainn's *The Scottish Insurrection of 1820* in the *New Statesman*. I'd been there before, and I was glad to go back.[8]

He adds that the poem is about 'the insult of high culture and the effort by a self-taught man to domesticate the Classics for his own ends'.[9] The development of the Paisley cotton industry, which led to the weavers' strike in 1812 and the riots of 1820, eventually culminating in the execution of three workers, serves as the historical context of the poem:

> In Paisley when they read the Riot Act
> We faced the horsemen of the 10th Hussars.
> Men's bones were broken, angry heads were cracked.
> (*B*, 19)

[7] Ibid., 207-208.
[8] Nicholson, 'Dimensions of the Sentient', 195.
[9] Ibid.

Harrison's 'The Rhubarbarians' depicts a corresponding scene between the Leeds weavers and the riot police:

> What t'mob said to the cannons on the mills,
> shouted to soldier, scab and sentinel
> 's silence, parries and hush on whistling hills,
> shadows in moonlight playing knurr and spell.[10]

There is a chilling irony in the Student's quoting the soldiers' words: '"If you want life", they said, "you must die first"' (*B*, 20). Here Dunn recontextualises what he says in 'The Come-on': 'You will lose heart: don't show it' (*B*, 14). There he refers to the spiritual death of the old self and the birth of a new one through the various compromises one may have to make in the course of education. He re-creates the myth of freemasonry in the Student's figure, whose 'clandestine' literary study is a secret plot against the Establishment, and his dialogue with the text – a 'partnership/ Of lexicon and text' (*B*, 19) – and the author – 'Tacitus, old friend' (*B*, 20) – also gains an emotional overtone. He describes culture in economic terms and the concept of education as a form of theft comes to surface: 'these five books thieved,/ These two books borrowed, handed down' (*B*, 19). Study and work overlap, and the Student stands for a kind of work ethic that does not differentiate between mental and physical effort. The mixture of intimacy and moral obligation resembles Dunn's own perception of poetry as a form of craftsmanship. Study gets identified with work in metaphors, for example: 'my scholarship of barley' (*B*, 20). In the simile 'Such hard work urges me to turn each line/ as firmly as I plough a furrow straight' (*B*, 20)

[10] Tony Harrison, 'The Rhubarbarians', in *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 113-14 (p. 113).

Dunn refers to the origin of 'verse' in the Latin word *versus*, which meant the turning of the plough at the end of a furrow.

Bakhtin draws attention to the sociolinguistic fact that 'all language is ideological':

> The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of the individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One's own discourse, and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of another's discourse. This process is made more complex by the fact that a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual's consciousness (just as they struggle with one another in surrounding social reality).[11]

Dunn's Student reads Tacitus for the same reason that motivates the poetry of Tony Harrison, who says in 'On Not Being Milton' (published in the 1981 volume *Continuous*): 'Articulation is the tongue-tied's fighting'.[12] Tacitus and Milton were both acknowledged masters of the art of Latin prose writing and sharp critics of the official ideologies of their time, and so the work of both of these writers reflects on the effect of personal experience on their historical outlook. Coming from a Leeds working-class background, Harrison treasures his education in the classics. Like Harrison's, Dunn's writing implies a linguistic relativism that may remind us of the Bakhtinian concept 'heteroglossia'. Dentith defines the term as 'another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way'.[13] Heteroglossia may also imply the occupation of an authoritative position, as in Dunn's poem, where the Student aspires to 'master' Tacitus's authority. In a less

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[11] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259-422 (p. 348).
[12] Tony Harrison, 'On Not Being Milton', in *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 112.
[13] Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 218.

specific sense, Pearce describes the same phenomenon as a 'mixed social register'.[14] The dynamic of Dunn's poem originates in the tension between the Student's social status and his eccentric quest for education, and the fact that as a worker he is not expected to study the classics. As Pearce suggests, heteroglossia 'refers to the "internal differentiation" and "stratification" of different registers *within* a language: in particular, the struggle between official (ideologically dominant) and non-official registers'.[15]

Aesthetic tension originates in a similar struggle between registers in Zbigniew Herbert's 'Journey to Kraków', which records a conversation with a farmer boy who passes judgement on classic works of literature. Herbert's poem concludes on the emblematic image of the boy's fingerprints left on the pages of his book:

> in the white margins
> the prints of fingers and the soil
> have marked with rough thumb-nail
> rapture and condemnation.[16]

Both Herbert's farmer boy and Dunn's weaver student exhibit an unconditional openness to the otherness of the text. Dunn demonstrates it with moral friction, and Herbert with tender irony, that the willingness itself to enter into dialogues with literature is a universal human precondition, which may even precede education, and, apparently, is unrelated to social status. Herbert's and Dunn's poems seem to imply the potential of the initial 'naive fusion of horizons' to be 'corrected and expanded' in the course of (self-)education. By illustrating this democratic aspect of culture,

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[14] Lynne Pearce, *Reading Dialogics*, Interrogating Texts Series (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), 60.
[15] Ibid., 62.
[16] Zbigniew Herbert, 'Journey to Kraków', in *Selected Poems*, ed. and trans. by Czeslaw Milosz and Peter Dale Scott (Manchester: Carcanet, 1985), 42-43 (p. 43).

both Herbert and Dunn question social prejudices. But while Dunn's poem is about the impenetrability of the British class system in the nineteenth century (with contemporary significance, of course), Herbert reflects on what may happen when the prevailing social order brings culture within the reach of the lower classes, as one of the very few benefits of the socialist system in Eastern Europe was that education was made accessible for everyone and more or less at the same standard.

For Jauss, the dialectic of interrogation and response, of question and answer, provides the model for literary communication with texts and traditions: to 'understand something [...] means to understand something as an answer, and, more precisely, to test one's own view against that of the other, through question and answer'.[17] Geyer-Ryan draws attention to an analogy between the poetics of Brecht and Harrison's *The School of Eloquence*.[18] But, like Harrison, in various ways Dunn and Herbert also owe a debt to Brecht's paradigmatic poem 'Questions from a worker who reads' in that irony comes as a result of the divergent horizons of expectations and a following eccentric dialogue with texts. Brecht cites the questions of the worker:

> Who built Thebes of the seven gates?
> In the books you will find the names of kings.
> Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?[19]

[17] Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 213.
[18] Helga Geyer-Ryan, 'Heteroglossia in the Poetry of Bertolt Brecht and Tony Harrison', in *The Taming of the Text: Explorations in Language, Literature and Culture*, ed. by Willie van Peer (London: Routledge, 1989), 193-221.
[19] Bertolt Brecht, 'Questions from a worker who reads', trans. by Michael Hamburger, in *Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913-1956*, ed. by John Willet and Ralph Manheim (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981). Cited in: Geyer-Ryan, 'Heteroglossia in the Poetry of Bertolt Brecht and Tony Harrison', 201. Brecht's poem is also available in Edwin Morgan's translation; see: Bertolt Brecht, 'A worker reads, and asks these questions', in Edwin Morgan, *Collected Translations* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), 44.

Harrison's 'The Ballad of Babelabour', which takes its epigraph from Brecht, poses a related question: 'What ur-*Sprache* did the labour speak?'.[20] Any parallel between Harrison and Brecht is no coincidence. As Neil Astley notes, 'Harrison is also a public poet and dramatist, and has extended the Brechtian tradition of music theatre in his work for stage, opera house and television'.[21] Geyer-Ryan looks at instances of cultural relativism in Harrison's work from the aspect of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, but I propose that a new concept, which may be termed 'hermeneutic diglossia' (as derived from Jauss's aesthetics of reception), could also be illuminating, particularly in Dunn and Herbert. Briefly, hermeneutic diglossia refers to an ability to address, and initiate a dialogue with, a work of literature which is written in, or translated into, a dialect other than that which is spoken by its reader. In the work of Dunn and Herbert a similar kind of 'pragmatic oxymoron'[22] is observable as that which motivates some of Harrison's poems in *The School of Eloquence* and *Continuous*. However, while what Geyer-Ryan terms 'sociolinguistic patchworks'[23] primarily reflect the struggle identified by Bakhtin as taking place between 'a variety of alien voices' in Harrison, Dunn's and Herbert's personae, similarly to Brecht's worker who reads, enter into hermeneutic dialogues with products of literature, that is voices represented as texts. Dunn's and Herbert's dialogues are ideological in that they indirectly question prescriptive norms as to who are entitled to be included in 'the constitution of meaning'.[24] Rather than merely a sociolinguistic diglossia, Dunn's weaver student and Herbert's farmer boy, then, also exhibit a capacity for

[20] Tony Harrison, 'The Ballad of Babelabour', in *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 102-103 (p. 103).
[21] Neil Astley, 'The Wizard of [Uz]', in *Tony Harrison*, ed. by Neil Astley, Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies, 1 (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 1991), 10-13 (p. 12).
[22] Geyer-Ryan, 'Heteroglossia in the Poetry of Bertolt Brecht and Tony Harrison', 202.
[23] Ibid., 209.
[24] Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 211.

hermeneutic diglossia, that is a willingness to recognise the otherness of the text, as they demonstrate the ability to enter into dialogues with traditions associated with a cultural domain from which they have been normally excluded.

'The Disguise', the closing poem of *Love or Nothing*, introduces the idea of stylised dialogues between opposing forces by referring to an imaginative take-over of the dominant line of English poetic tradition as represented by metrical verse:

> And they say, 'Go out smiling, let your poems
> Tickle the ribs of Optimism
> On an absolute prosody that ticks over
> With the strength of an intricate machine,
> Not this free verse you can buy at Woolworths.'
> (*LN*, 63)

Neil Corcoran notes that 'the most interesting poetry of those writers who began to publish after 1970 is written as in some sense oppositional or antagonistic to an idea of a dominant cultural or linguistic system'.[25] Dunn's poem reflects the oppositional nature of his ambition in a pronominal polarisation, which foreshadows Harrison's 'Them & [uz]' in *Continuous*. Hoggart's definition of the socially other from the perspective of the lower classes clearly echoes the world of *Terry Street*: '"They" are "the people at the top", "the higher-ups", the people who give you your dole, call you up, tell you to go to war, fine you'.[26] The subject of the conflict is now the possession of High Culture in the domain of literary tradition, and so in 'The Disguise' antagonisms are translated into an aesthetic tension between 'absolute prosody' and cheap free verse. Dunn's 'grins, winks, fingers' relate to a sense of mischief but his acceptance of the poetic challenge will be 'the finest insult'. There

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[25] Corcoran, *English Poetry Since 1940*, 197.
[26] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of working-class life, with special references to publications and entertainments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), 62.

is a sharp contrast between the delightful rascality in 'The Disguise' and his earlier attitude in 'A Dream of Judgement', which patrols similar areas of cultural hierarchy with much less conviction. 'The Disguise' is written in free verse, and, as Dunn explains, at that time this metrical freedom was regarded as an ideological statement.[27] But the poetry of regionalism in the 1960s and 1970s can be associated with a strong sense of formalism, which is manifest in Heaney's Petrarchan and Harrison's Meredithian sonnets, and also in Dunn's metrical variety. Harrison suggests that this is a 'deliberately dramatised contradiction' and a way of 'both testing the aspiration towards eloquence [...] but also a way of subjecting the classical form [...] to those things which you would think most likely to destroy it',[28] whereas Dunn intended to use form as 'an indication of strategy, as an ironic gesture, as a testimony, perhaps, to political indecision and the presence of complication which the plainness of style might seem to have rejected'.[29] Sean O'Brien observes that the 'occupation' of tradition means 'acquisition' in Dunn, and 'transformation' in Harrison,[30] and Robinson describes Dunn's literary enterprise as 'the Scottish writer's aspiration towards the idealised urbanity of English letters'.[31] But Dunn wants to occupy a cultural position without giving up his Scottish, 'barbarian' identity: 'I want to be a poet of High Culture but at the same time I don't want to be disloyal to my native parish, my home, my most immediate people, children, friends'.[32] Cairns Craig suggests that 'Dunn is situating his opposition to English

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[27] William Oxley, 'Interview with Douglas Dunn', *Acumen*, 13 (1991), 9-20 (p. 16).
[28] Clive Wilmer, 'Tony Harrison' [an interview], in *Poets Talking* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), 97-103 (p. 102).
[29] Douglas Dunn, 'Rhyme', *Poetry Wales*, 15.3 (1979), pp. 39-42 [including the poem 'Loch Music', pp. 41-42] (p. 40).
[30] O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse*, 77.
[31] Alan Robinson, 'The Mastering Eye: Douglas Dunn's Social Perceptions', in *Instabilities in Contemporary British Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 82-99 (p. 92).
[32] Attila Dósa, 'A Different Drummer' [an interview with Douglas Dunn], *Poetry Review*, 89.3 (1999), 27-34 (p. 29). See: Appendix.

culture within elegant classical forms of English verse'.[33] While considering this aesthetic enterprise in an English context, one has to remember that most of these prestige forms and genres, such as the sonnet or the pastoral, are the properties of English literature only as a part of an international horizon. Moreover, the Burns-stanza Dunn employs in 'Tannahill', which is an extension of 'Barbarian Pastorals' in *St Kilda's Parliament*, has its roots in Scottish popular tradition. In the 1990s Dunn still voices a democratic and classless view of tradition when he warns us against pressing an analogy between formalism and political convictions too hard:

> Form in poetry, and form as an abstraction associated with political and social beliefs, seem to me completely unrelated. The connection is forced only by argumentative desperation. They can be linked only if a conservative poet insists on it; and were such a poet to urge this association, then he or she could be criticised as an enemy of poetry. (*WTD*, 100)

Cavafy's 'Waiting for the Barbarians' takes its impetus from the Modernist conviction that urbanised civilisation is in need of a rejuvenating impact, represented by the expected arrival of the barbarians. But can it be regarded as an intertext of Dunn's 'Barbarian Pastorals'? Dunn mentions Cavafy's poem in his 1978 essay on Derek Mahon's poetry,[34] but in retrospect he denies that it affected him in any practical way.[35] Both Cavafy and Dunn perceive the dynamic of the relationship between those described as 'barbarians' and 'others' as immediate to their aesthetic and moral purposes. The conceptual tension between the barbarian rebels and the poetic forms and languages traditionally associated with High Culture provides the driving force of Dunn's poems. The word 'barbarian' first occurs in Dunn's work in

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[33] Craig, 'From the Lost Ground', 363.
[34] Douglas Dunn, '"Let the God not abandon us": On the Poetry of Derek Mahon', *Stone Ferry Review*, 2 (1978), 7-30 (p. 21).
[35] Dósa, 'A Different Drummer', 29.

the 1972 poem 'Under the Stone' in a social context: 'Splendid barbarians, they form tribes in the slums/ Up certain dim streets, the tribes of second-hand' (*HL*, 53). While the barbarian take-over is an ontological need in Cavafy's poem, in Dunn it is a metaphor of a cultural ambition which is rooted in a class conflict, and is interrelated with issues concerning the uses of the English language. Dunn assumes that the attempt at occupying the dominant discourse meets resistance, whereas in Cavafy barbarians are seen as a potential means of redemption: 'Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians?/ Those people were a kind of solution'.[36] We can detect a similar need of external salvation in Auden's 'The Fall of Rome'. The last stanza pictures a powerful and majestically tranquil release of productive energy as opposed to banal and infertile rituals:

> Altogether elsewhere, vast
> Herds of reindeer move across
> Miles and miles of golden moss,
> Silently and very fast.[37]

The typical ambition of Modernism to activate anthropologically coded instincts and subconsciously absorbed energies is against Dunn's reconciliatory and peaceful temperament. Jarniewicz is right to say that 'Dunn's barbarism [...] may be readily abandoned whenever a different strategy is pursued, as in the poems of *St Kilda's Parliament*, where Dunn adopts the pose of a cultured Scottish poet, practically a guardian of the national cultural heritage, or in *Europa's Lover*'.[38]

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[36] C. P. Cavafy, 'Waiting for the Barbarians', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by George Savidis, trans. by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), 14-15 (p. 15).
[37] W. H. Auden, 'The Fall of Rome', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 332-33 (p. 333).
[38] Jarniewicz, *The Uses of the Commonplace*, 162.

Dunn's approach, however, is not altogether dissimilar from Cavafy's, when, instead of discarding already existing institutions, he suggests that the 'barbarians' should make use of them for the benefit of society: 'Just as the Goths especially sought not to dismantle or destroy Roman institutions but to take them over and use them for their own ends, clean them up and reform them, revitalise them, it seems to me as a socialist that the working-class movement in politics seeks not to destroy British institutions or Scottish or English institutions or whatever, but to reform them and revivify them'.[39] He attributes a moral significance to this movement when he (re)defines barbarians as 'people who contest the Establishment and the degeneration of the State'.[40] So Edwin Morgan is right to formulate the question: are the barbarians those who stand outside the gate or those who refuse to let them in?[41] In 'The Come-on', the poem which opens 'Barbarian Pastorals', and which may well be the unacknowledged manifesto of a poetic generation, Dunn describes the reform of cultural institutions metaphorically as entering a garden. Corcoran suggests that 'the barbarians – "the disinherited from farther back" – now inherit, or occupy, the civilised garden of English poetic decorum'.[42] Dunn takes the epigraph of 'The Come-on' from Albert Camus: 'the guardian, the king's son, who kept watch over the gates of the garden in which I wanted to live' (*B*, 13). The conclusion of the poem places Camus's words in a specific social context:

> We will beat them with decorum, with manners,
> As sly as language is [...]
> You will lose heart: don't show it. Be patient;
> And sit on that high wall
> In its obstacle glass chips, its barbed wire,

[39] Robert Crawford, 'Douglas Dunn Talking with Robert Crawford', *Verse*, 4 (1985), 26-34 (pp. 27-28).
[40] Ibid., 28.
[41] Edwin Morgan, 'Their Noble Rage' [a review of *B*], *New Edinburgh Review*, 46 (1979), 29-30 (p. 29).
[42] Corcoran, *English Poetry Since 1940*, 156.

Watching the gardeners.
One day we will leap down, into the garden,
And open the gate – *wide, wide.*
We too shall be kings' sons and guardians,
And then there will be no wall:
Our grudges will look quaint and terrible.
(*B*, 14)

'So right, yer buggers, then! We'll occupy/ your lousy leasehold Poetry', writes Tony Harrison in Part II of 'Them and [uz]',[43] in a declaration of rights, in which 'Poetry' may be a deliberate slip for 'property'. Corcoran draws attention to the fact that the 'metaphor knows that poetry is property; and if property is theft, then this thief will steal some of it back again, on behalf of the dispossessed community of that "we"'.[44] Dunn's italicised '*wide, wide*' in 'The Come-on' should be read alongside Harrison's also italicised interjection in the last line of the third sonnet of his 'Wordlists' sequence: '*Fling our doors wide! All, all, not one, but all!*',[45] which provides another metaphor of breaking into the imaginary territory of what Dunn calls 'the poetic possibilities' of the English language.[46]

'In the Grounds' records the event of an innocent trespassing, which brings old social prejudices to surface:

Barbarians in a garden, softness does
Approve of who we are as it does those
Who when we speak proclaim us barbarous
And say we have no business with the rose.
(*B*, 15)

[43] Tony Harrison, 'Them and [uz]', in *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 122-23 (p. 123).
[44] Corcoran, *English Poetry Since 1940*, 160.
[45] Tony Harrison, 'Wordlists', in *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 117-19 (p. 119).
[46] Dósa, 'A Different Drummer', 29.

The rose is a symbol of refined taste and education, and can be seen as an allusion to poetry. The incident reveals a reluctance to recognise, or give credit to, the 'others'. Heaney's 'The Ministry of Fear' provides an analogue, as territory equals culture, poetry is property, and lawn is prosody:

> Those hobnailed boots from beyond the mountain
> Were walking, by God, all over the fine
> Lawns of elocution.[47]

One needs to remember that Dunn praises poetic decorum as opposed to the dialectal inclusions with which both Harrison and Heaney often operate. However, all of these three poets lay a heavy emphasis on the uses of form, metre and rhyme in their writing and we may detect a mischievous spirit in their intentions to not merely come up to, but rather to surprise the reader's expectations. Dunn suggests, 'if you can fulfil an expectation, then you are halfway towards one day surprising it, which is the delight of poetry to do'.[48] In 'Here be Dragons – Pomponius Mela, *Chronographia*' when Dunn's barbarians surprise the Romans' expectations it proves to be a fatal experience:

> One story's left, the one that Mela tells
> That's their revenge – the one about the well.
> Arriving there thirsty and out of breath,
> Romans might drink, then laugh themselves to death.
> (*B*, 17)

'An Artist Waiting in a Country House', a long meditative poem in iambic pentameters, also takes as its subject an intrusion into private property but the garden

[47] Seamus Heaney, 'The Ministry of Fear', in *New Selected Poems: 1966-1987* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 82-84 (pp. 82-83).
[48] King, 'Three New Poets', 226.

motif is more significant in the dramatic monologue 'Gardeners', which is set in a fictitious Loamshire in the year of the French Revolution. As Dunn explains, it is 'a poem against property'.[49] The garden embodies artistry, as the expressions 'natural delight', 'horticulture', 'design' or 'craftsmanship' suggest. But, in the same way as the garden is the property of a gentleman, the right to artistry is expropriated by the landholder:

> But pardon us,
> My Lord, if we reluctantly admit
> Our horticulture not the whole of it,
> Forgetting, that for you, this elegance
> Is not our work, but your far tidier Sense.
> (*B*, 17)

Geyer-Ryan draws attention to the frequently quoted dictum by Walter Benjamin, who was also a friend and critic of Brecht: 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism'.[50] Dunn's poem illustrates the assumptions behind the questions of Brecht's worker who reads, and, in an apparent contradiction, reflects on the gardeners' manner of speech as polite and elegant.

'The Wealth' and 'Rough-cast', both autobiographically inspired lyrical monologues in metre, draw on a tension between the predicament of the outsider and a sense of community. This antagonism becomes a central concern in Dunn's later work. 'Rough-cast' is the first poem where the word 'exile' occurs. (A related term, 'inner émigré', will emerge later in *Northlight*.) The poem features the dialectic of being away and returning home in a similar manner as in 'Renfrewshire Traveller':

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[49] Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 24.
[50] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 253-64 (p. 253).

'Twelve years away and I cannot/ Break out' (*B*, 25). But, unlike in the earlier poem, this time we get a stronger sense of filial attachment to the native soil. The tension between familiarity and being a visitor is overlapped by the dialectic between public commitment and domesticity, but the repetition of the wall motif transforms privacy into a sense of confinement. The lines 'a chill thought/ Made walls open, made doors open' (*B*, 25) develop the opening theme of 'The Come-on' further, whereas in the second half of the poem the dialectic between commitment and withdrawal changes into an existentialist choice, as in 'Realisms'. The elegiac mode reflects Dunn's disappointment about the social role of the poet, in place of which he embraces the virtues of reclusive provincialism in the concluding lines:

> Better to root here among ferns
> Close by home with those others who
> Are devising their justice, sunk
> In their holes in the ground somewhere.
> (*B*, 25)

If the opening poem of the first sequence in *Barbarians* is optimistic and energetic, then 'Elegy for the Lost Parish', which starts the second part of the book, is nostalgic and dejected. It is a collective elegy in the manner of Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'. Even the form of the two poems, iambic pentameters organised into quatrains with alternating rhymes, is identical. As in Goldsmith's 'The Deserted Village', the theme of Dunn's poem is rural depopulation brought about by industrialisation. Dunn translates social change into the life of an individual and the intensity of feeling is in part effected by the incremental repetition of 'Dream, ploughman', which introduces the odd stanzas except the last one. The movement of the poem leads us from 'sadness' to 'heartbreak', but the concluding note, 'loneliness of virtue', sounds slightly antiquated. The chronological gap

between past and present implied by a distance between the lyrical self and his subject matter is the central theme of 'St Kilda's Parliament 1879-1979'. Both the ploughman and the inhabitants of St Kilda are outside society chronologically, just as Dunn perceives himself as an outsider, or inner émigré, in an imaginative sense. As in most elegies, the past addresses us through an absence in the present in the autobiographical 'The Musician', which takes its inspiration from a recently deceased old man in the parish who had two fiddles: he used one of them for entertaining the village folk and the other for the solitary enjoyment of classical music. The poem is a monologue, but MacAuley's two fiddles lying side-by-side betoken Dunn's belief in the legitimacy of the parallel existence of diverse voices in poetry, and are also emblematic of his binary, social and aesthetic, allegiances.

'Ballad of the Two Left Hands' continues the ballad theme of 'Drowning'. Here Dunn only casually follows the alternating four and three-beat lines of the ballad form, but incremental repetitions ('When walking out one morning') and the *xaxa* rhyme scheme of the poem all resound the Scottish ballad structure. The poem harks back to Auden's Glasgow ballad 'As I Walked Out One Evening', which, in turn, echoes Burns's 'A Red, Red Rose':

> "I'll love you, dear, I'll love you
> Till China and Africa meet,
> And the river jumps over the mountain
> And the salmon sing in the street..."[51]

The word 'left' in the title of Dunn's poem insinuates a political overtone, but it equally symbolises social disadvantage. Dunn is concerned with social prejudice and deprivation in a way slightly resonant of 'The Come-on', inasmuch as outfit is

[51] W. H. Auden, 'As I Walked Out One Evening', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 133-35 (p. 133).

identified with social distinction. The line '"Beware of men in suits", one said' rhymes with the phrase 'men in prunella' in the opening piece of 'Barbarian Pastorals', where difference in clothing alludes to a division that originates in the absence of a willingness to recognise otherness. He translates the notion of inheriting a sin, a conventional theme of the ballad, into the working-class environment. We may detect a Calvinist view of predestination behind his description of a 'new apprentice pouring tea/ From his father's thermos flask' (*B*, 42). The dynamic in 'Ballad of the Two Left Hands' originates in the antagonistic relationship between different layers of society:

> Economy is hand and sweat
> And foundrymen and fire
> Revise your textbooks, multiply
> Your guilt by your desire.
> (*B*, 43)

But here the attempt to establish a meaningful dialogue between these opposing forces is eclipsed by the fact that the poem is too reflexive and introvert to commence a dialogue. As in 'Empires', in 'Ballad of the Two Left Hands' a sense of redundancy gives an elegiac touch to the poem, while the reference to 'dignity' in the ultimate stanza reveals that for Dunn social inequality is not merely a question of political awareness, but, more importantly, it has to do with the moral integrity of society.

'Warriors', another poem with a strong regional identity, also exhibits the lyrical poet's belief in social justice. This belief comes to surface in the form of empathy rather than in the expression of a political allegiance. The child's perspective is central to Dunn's early verse and the heartfelt vignette of two First World War veterans also preserves the image of the two 'disabled servicemen' as it

has been filtered through the poet's childhood consciousness. Another vignette, the symbolist 'Glasgow Schoolboys, Running Backwards' provides a Scottish counterpart of Terry Street:

> High wind... They turn their backs to it, and push.
> Their crazy strides are chopped in little steps.
> And all their lives, like that, they'll have to rush
> Forwards in reverse, always holding their caps.
> (*B*, 39)

The sharp image of the boys running backwards, holding their caps, suggests a social application of the Calvinist teaching of predestination in the same way as in 'Ballad of the Two Left Hands'. Dunn's relish in photographic imagination emerges again but photography tends to be the subject matter rather than the mode of representation. As in 'St Kilda's Parliament, 1879-1979', in 'Portrait Photograph, 1915' an old snapshot occasions a meditation on past and present, and on the possibility of preserving old cultural values both in the life of the community and the individual. The poem is pervaded by a similar elegiac tactility that characterises 'Glasgow Schoolboys...', in which the past is going to determine the children's future.

Sean O'Brien suggests that Dunn wrote 'Barbarian Pastorals' from 'a prophetic sense of Thatcherism to come', but adds that he has 'never found a political future to match his dramatic grasp of the past'.[52] A similar sense of anachronism characterises Dunn's procedures in *St Kilda's Parliament*, where he invents a reclusive persona in the anachronistic mask of the 'dominie', an old-fashioned Scottish schoolmaster. He introduces the theme in 'Dominies', a poem about his boyhood memories: 'It is

[52] O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse*, 71.

Scotland and I attend the dead dominies' (*SKP*, 21). More importantly, he describes himself in the pose of the dominie in 'Remembering Lunch', in which he launches criticism against London literary life from the 'provinces' in a Horatian manner: 'Manias without charm, cynicism without wit, and integrity/ Lying around so long it has begun to stink' (*SKP*, 45). Herbert observes that in *Northlight* Dunn valorises small-town existence from the same consideration as Horace in his poems addressed to Maecenas: it provides him with a perspective from which to consider urban living.[53] The same is valid for 'Remembering Lunch', in which, unlike other 'provincial' poets who 'look towards London as to a sea of restaurants', Dunn expresses his disenchantment with routine existence in the metropolis: 'Its sum of parts no longer presents a street of epiphanies' (*SKP*, 45). In lines like these he professes the Horatian virtue of *nil admirari*. He contrasts 'the business of capitals' with a form of modest epicureanism, represented by long walks along the shore in his 'estuarial republic' of the north in 'contented solitude' (*SKP*, 44), and 'with a pocketful of bread and cheese,/ My hipflask and the *Poésie* of Philippe Jaccottet' (*SKP*, 46). Herbert discerns 'a sense of liberation from time's value-system, in which all that is past is not necessarily worse than all that is present' in Dunn's later poetry,[54] but I suggest that we may trace a comparable sense of chronological self-emancipation in his archaising nostalgia in 'Remembering Lunch', as he adopts the pose of a dominie who is:

> well-dressed in tweeds and serviceable shoes
> Although not like an inverted popinjay of the demented gentry
> But as a schoolmaster of some reading and sensibility
> *Circa* 1930 and up to his eccentric week-end pursuits, noticing,
> Before the flood of specialists, the trace of lost peoples
> In a partly eroded mound, marks in the earth, or this and that
> Turned over with the aforementioned impermeable footwear.
> (*SKP*, 44)

[53] W. N. Herbert, 'Dunn and Dundee', 124.
[54] Ibid., 125.

What is a means of collective self-definition for Heaney in the bog poems, the discovery of 'the trace of lost peoples' (or 'this and that') becomes an eccentric pastime of Dunn's introvert poetic persona. In this attempt to 'combine sophistication and simplicity' Crawford recognises Dunn's dominie as a 'sophisticated barbarian', a 'descendant of Burns's "man of independent mind"'.[55] Crawford also suggests that Dunn's 'ironic self-awareness' saves the poem from nostalgia, but not, we might add, from an embarrassed sense of anachronism, of being an émigré in time, which lingers on in the self-ironic conclusion:

> it is a cause for fear to notice that only my footprints
> Litter this deserted beach with signs of human approach,
> Each squelch of leather on mud complaining, *But where are you going?*
> (*SKP*, 46)

In 'John Wilson in Greenock, 1786' Dunn portrays a 'dominie of the poets', who, under the pressure of local authorities, gave up writing poetry. Dunn included a reference to the Clyde's poet in his anthology *The Poetry of Scotland*, first published in 1979: '[Wilson's] career ended when he took the position of headmaster of the Greenock Grammar School, where the interviewing committee bonded him by a legal and ecclesiastical document to leave over forever "the profane and unprofitable art of poem-making"'.[56] Embittered by inertia, he wrote this five-page Jeremiad in Wilson's rhyming iambic pentameters as a tribute to the memory of the eighteenth-century poet from Strathclyde. Richard Price stresses the importance of Dunn's literary allegiance to the place 'as a poet-critic-in-verse', apart from this poem, in 'The Student' and

[55] Crawford, 'Secret Villager', 116.
[56] Douglas Dunn, 'Introduction', in *The Poetry of Scotland*, ed. by Douglas Dunn (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1979), 11-16 (p. 13).

'Tannahill'.[57] Seen in the context of the rural-urban cultural debate described by Raymond Williams, Dunn has an ambition to fictionalise parts of rural and small-town Scotland here, as well as in his two collections of short stories, *Secret Villages* and *Boyfriends and Girlfriends*, and in some of his later poems. But, given the strength and popular acclaim of contemporary Scottish urban fiction, Crawford's anxiety about Dunn's interest in the country, 'that (particularly non-Scottish) readers will assume simply that Scotland is a rurally-based, rather dated environment',[58] seems to be an overreaction. Dunn projects his own aspiration for an imaginative reconstruction of the place, which also motivated him in 'Fixed', onto Wilson's Romantic sensibility:

> I first took up my pen
> To lift our Lowland snipe and water-hen
> Into Arcadia from Lanarkshire.
> (*SKP*, 58)

But Dunn's solitary localism comprises a tragic perspective, as Wilson eventually failed to create a 'heathen Georgic in a Lowland burn' (*SKP*, 60).

So did Robert Tannahill, another wasted local talent from the eighteenth-century, who drowned himself in a fit of depression when he was unable to find financial support for his songs and poems. Rather than with the native *poeta doctus*, in 'Tannahill' Dunn is concerned with the plebeian talent, as becomes clear from the reference to Burns the 'ploughman poet' (*SKP*, 53). Tannahill was a Paisley weaver, like the speaker of 'The Student: Of Renfrewshire'. Weaving and writing may be linked up with justice if we consider that the word 'text' derives from the Latin verb *texo*, which has 'weave' as its first meaning. We may discern the same imaginative leap in

[57] Richard Price, 'Taking Exception: Douglas Dunn's Criticism', in *Reading Douglas Dunn*, ed. by Robert Crawford and David Kinloch, Modern Scottish Writers Series (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 168-81 (p. 173).
[58] Crawford, 'Secret Villager', 116.

Dunn's phrasing when he points out the connection between Tannahill and Burns: 'a competent weaver, [Tannahill] wrote songs and began to pick up the threads, so to speak, of Burns's work'.[59] The Gryfe, Cart and Clyde are waters that feature both in 'Tannahill' and its twin poem about John Wilson, whose best-known work, 'The Clyde', is a long description of the river. (We find a short excerpt from Wilson's poem in Dunn's above mentioned 1979 anthology *The Poetry of Scotland.*) In Dunn's imagination the River Clyde seems to function as a metaphorical impediment to ability and potential, which creates an apparent contrast with his typical interest in estuaries. In 'Unlucky Mariners' the river is described as 'the transparent grave of the fish' (*LN*, 26). The Gryfe, a tributary of the Clyde, is a place for suicide in 'Drowning' in *Barbarians*, and so is an unidentified river that 'wears/ The neon flowers of suicides' in 'The River Through the City' and another one in 'Supreme Death' in *The Happier Life*. While the waves are depicted as 'native vomits at the Clyde's sick mouth' in 'John Wilson in Greenock, 1786' (*SKP*, 61), it is either the riverside that attracts Dunn's attention, 'that southern, pastoral side/ Of the tall, shipyarded Clyde',[60] or the perspective of the firth in 'Landscape with One Figure' and 'Ships' in *Terry Street*, and the view of the 'widening estuary' in 'Remembering Lunch'. This aspect of the Scottish landscape becomes more dominant in his later poetry, and provides *Elegies* and *Northlight* with a distinctive atmosphere, only the setting is no more the Firth of Clyde but the estuarial Firth of Tay.

Dunn employs the Burns stanza, otherwise known as Standard Habbie, in 'Tannahill'. The stanza pattern takes its name from Robert Sempill's seventeenth-century mock-elegy 'The Life and Death of Habbie Simpson, the Piper of Kilbarchan', which was collected by the Edinburgh printer John Watson in *A Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Poems both Ancient and Modern.* On the basis of research made by

[59] Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 25.
[60] Dunn, 'Fixed' (*HL*, 64).

Henley, Henderson and MacLaine, Dunn notes that we can find the earliest occurrence of this six-line stanza, also known as *rime couée*, in the twelfth century.[61] We can encounter this form in English poetry from the thirteenth century and its first occurrence in Scottish poetry is in David Lindsay's *Ane Pleasant Satire of the Thrie Estaitis* from around 1540. But the stanza became popular as the form of Sempill's poem, and was handed down to Burns by Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson. Burns used it for satirical purposes for example in 'Address to the Deil', 'To a Louse' and 'Holy Willie's Prayer'. But Dunn maintains it is essentially an elegiac stanza, and in Haffenden's interview he remarks that in 'Tannahill' he 'wanted to restore it to its previous dignity'.[62] In poetry in English, since Burns the stanza named after him has been used by such diverse poets as Wordsworth in 'At the Grave of Burns, 1803: Seven Years After His Death'; Robert Garioch in 'To Robert Fergusson'; and, more recently, John Fuller in 'Epistles to Several Persons' or Seamus Heaney in 'An Open Letter'.

Literariness and intertextuality are in the conceptual focus of *St Kilda's Parliament*. 'Tannahill' was a part of a literary project: in the second half of the 1970s Dunn was interested in creating a portrait gallery of local poets excluded from the mainstream of Scottish literary history. 'Tannahill' is Dunn's own 'lament for the makars', as is suggested by his quoting the Latin language refrain of William Dunbar's poem from around 1500: '*Timor mortis conturbat me*' (*SKP*, 53). He offers an alternative canon of Lowland poets, which includes Robert Tannahill, the forgotten John Leyden, Alexander Smith, David Gray, and the Robert Fergusson who is remembered today as Burns's favourite poet:

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[61] Douglas Dunn, '"A Very Scottish Kind of Dash": Burns's Native Metric', in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, ed. by Robert Crawford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 58-85 (p. 62).
[62] Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 26.

> Young dead like Leyden, Smith and Gray,
> Unread, forgotten, sternly weigh
> Against the doors of elegy
> And find them shut.
> (*SKP*, 53)

After 'Tannahill' and 'John Wilson in Greenock, 1786', he planned to write poems about Leyden and Smith: 'Once I'd done those, I think I would have covered a large spectrum of the personalities, concerns and issues involved in Scottish literature – almost like a critical work'.[63] Though noticing the positive, revising aspect to it, exactly that is what Crawford condemns in Dunn's enterprise when he says that such a project 'sounds too willed', and is 'rather academic'.[64] Dunn may have had the same impression, and has left this project unfinished.

Apart from such literary pieces as 'Remembering Lunch', 'Tannahill', 'John Wilson in Greenock, 1786', 'The Deserter' or 'The Miniature Métro', 'Green Breeks' also suggests a great degree of textual self-awareness. 'Tannahill', 'John Wilson in Greenock, 1786' and 'Green Breeks' form a sequence that in many respects carries on Dunn's main concerns in *Barbarians*, and he says he may have included these three poems in that earlier book.[65] Dunn makes a bibliographically meticulous reference in the subtitle of 'Green Breeks': 'J. G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott*, Macmillan, 1900. Vol. 1, pages 81-5' (*SKP*, 47). By doing so, he recontextualises literary history as a form of social documentary. 'Green Breeks', which covers an episode from Walter Scott's biography, offers a parallel history in a plebeian spirit that is not dissimilar from the disposition of 'Barbarian Pastorals'. Crawford draws attention to conceptual links within Dunn's work by suggesting that 'the Green Breeks who "nursed his lovely grudge" [...] is clearly akin to the Dunn-like speaker of the

[63] Ibid., 27.
[64] Crawford, 'Secret Villager', 113.
[65] See: King, 'Three New Poets', 226.

apparently autobiographical 'The Competition', who confronts a rich child who will never have "a grudge as lovely as mine"'.[66] To this we may add the grudge theme in 'The Come-on' (*B*, 14), and Dunn expands on the same idea in his *Stand* editorial 'The Grudge', in which he recalls the childhood memory of sitting on a wall in the posh end of his hometown:

> Poetry is like that wall. There are people who think they "own" poetry. They think poetry "serves" them. It doesn't; and when it does it is being exclusive and partial. So I have a grudge. My grudge is a good grudge. [...] It is my personal cataclysm, which I overstate, understate, and never understand.[67]

In the street fight, which is representative of social discrimination and prejudicial behaviour, Nicholson suggests that Dunn alludes to 'the Christian injunction to turn the other cheek'.[68] Contrary to Christian morals, Green Breeks, young Scott's opponent, refuses to humiliate himself: 'When they turn their cheeks/ The other way, he turns them back' (*SKP*, 50). Dunn expands on the mock-epic potential inherent in Scott's prose. The genre provides both him and Scott, whom he quotes throughout the poem, with a ready-made division of roles between 'barbarians' and 'patricians'. He attributes the part of the barbarian to Green Breeks, who is seen as 'a youthful Goth' (*SKP*, 48), and, consistently following the given set of roles, goes on to describe the lower-class boy as a 'boy-barbarian' and a 'vulgar general' (*SKP*, 48).

Another poem about social hierarchy that could have been included in 'Barbarian Pastorals' is 'Washing the Coins', an economically aware dramatic monologue based on a childhood experience of potato picking with Irish 'howkers'. In the spirit of 'Ballad of the Two Left Hands', this time Dunn illustrates the idea of

[66] Crawford, 'Secret Villager', 115.
[67] Dunn, 'Editorial: The Grudge', 6.
[68] Nicholson, 'Dimensions of the Sentient', 195.

economic despondency – 'It is not good to feel you have no future' (*SKP*, 25) – in finely crafted and realistic details of field work. Like his St Kilda monologue, this poem, too, could be seen in the critical context of internal colonisation, as is clear from a verbatim reference to Fanon's definitive study: 'portrayed/ Among the wretched of the native earth' (*SKP*, 25). Dunn's obsession with images of clay and mud recalls the early Heaney, another modern anti-British and anti-imperialist voice, in 'Digging' and 'At a Potato Digging'. From another point of view, an orthodox Marxist would probably read the lines 'rain in the face was also to have/ Something in common with bedraggled Irish' (*SKP*, 24), or 'Towards the end you felt you understood/ The happy rancour of the Irish howkers' (*SKP*, 25), as allusions to the international solidarity of the working classes. But Dunn's socialism, as we have seen, is of a spiritual nature. He is ready to parody the Marxist catch-phrase about the unity of the world's proletariat in 'Ratatouille', a mock-culinary pacifist manifesto: 'Come, lovers of ratatouille, and unite!' (*SKP*, 85). It would be unwise to reduce the association he discerns between the Irish and the Scots merely to an economic or political framework, as I noted about 'Realisms', another poem about Scoto-Irish relations. There is a passing reference to a complex web of relationships, which often excludes solidarity, among the 'minor nations' of the British Isles: 'She knew me, but she couldn't tell my face/ From an Irish boy's, and she apologized' (*SKP*, 25). In the conclusion Dunn opens up a religious perspective in the image of paying the day's wage, 'like praying together'. The following ritual of cleaning the coins from mud is rich in anti-imperialist references. The last line of the poem alludes to the uncomfortable imperial relation between England and her British realms, given that the 'English king' was the royal face of George VI on the silver coins and it was the old penny that had Britannia (the emblem of Great Britain represented as a female warrior figure) on its back:

My mother ran a basin of hot water.
We bathed my wages and we scrubbed them clean.
Once all that sediment was washed away,
That residue of field caked on my money,
I filled the basin to its brim with cold;
And when the water settled I could see
Two English kings among their drowned Britannias.
(*SKP*, 25)

Dunn considers social development against an ethical background, and calls for moral improvement in the anti-Calvinist 'The Apple Tree', which, in his words, 'promotes the gentle side of Scotland's nature'[69]:

Forge no false links of man
To land or creed, the true are good enough. Our lives
Crave codes of courtesy, ways of describing love.
(*SKP*, 18)

While in 'Realisms' Dunn saw the only way out in a 'surrender/ To the language' (*LN*, 20), here the apples – 'my missionary fruits' (*SKP*, 17) – embody the categorical imperative of 'try[ing] to live' (*SKP*, 18), and the growing saplings may give us hope. By promoting the Voltairean advice to cultivate our gardens, he leaves open the horizon of domestic comfort, another form of his modest epicureanism: 'an ordinary joy – a girl with a basket,/ With apples under a linen cloth' (*SKP*, 18). The epigrammatic wisdom of 'Keep your faith./ A sapling nursed to fruit impersonates salvation' (*SKP*, 18) is probably where he comes closest to a religiously motivated moralism in his pre-*Elegies* period. Still, we may trace a moral imperative in his choice of the poem's epigraph by Luther, the great moralist and religious reformer: 'And if the world should end tomorrow, I still would plant my apple tree' (*SKP*, 16). Dunn's 'apple tree' is poetry

[69] Douglas Dunn , 'Douglas Dunn writes…' [on the background of *SKP*], *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, 110 (1981), 1-2 (p. 2).

itself, as the act of writing becomes a testimony of his moral convictions. He speaks out against religious bigotry and other extremes attributed to Scottish living ('our coarse consent/ To drunken decency and sober violence,/ Our paradox of ways', *SKP*, 16), which were described by G. Gregory Smith as the 'Caledonian antisyzygy',[70] and canonised by MacDiarmid in 'A Theory of Scots Letters', 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea' and 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle'. As well as in 'Remembering Lunch', in 'The Apple Tree' Dunn advertises the Horatian ideal of *mediocritas*, a quiet reconciliation of extremities, when he acknowledges the merit of 'Good nature and a scent of fruit at dailygone' (*SKP*, 16).

Dunn associates patriotism and other forms of expression of civic allegiance with moral standards in 'Dominies', which carries on the barbarian theme of 'Barbarian Pastorals': 'What sorts of men were the Caesars? Did you have an axe,/ At the wall, against them? Did you stand for your country?' (*SKP*, 21). His patriotism is infused with a nostalgically democratic sentiment, which has a place for the tramps whom he asks to share 'the sad glugs' in their bottles in 'An Address on the Destitution of Scotland' (*SKP*, 20). Tom Nairn opens his preface to Christopher Harvie's 1997 collection of essays on Scottish history and politics with a quotation from Dunn's poem, and refers to its landscape as 'the *terrain vague* of our country, the land of inner tinkerdom'.[71] Nairn adds that this land was 'a unique domain of ghosts, a society which surrendered its state and hence the integrity that had previously been defended for half a millennium'.[72] Scotland has always been a kingdom, or a number of kingdoms, or a part of a kingdom. But before he became Head at the School of English at St Andrews in 1994, Dunn had prophesied the future of Scotland in a republican spirit: 'My

[70] G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1919), 4.
[71] Tom Nairn, 'Preface', in Christopher Harvie, *Travelling Scot: Essays on the History, Politics and Future of the Scots* (Glendarnel: Argyll Publishing, 1997), 8-10 (p. 8).
[72] Ibid.

political instincts have been republican for as long as I can remember and they've always existed in relation to Scotland'.[73] Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, his republicanism in verse was explicit. 'It was a long road back to this undeclared Republic', he writes after the failure of the 1979 Devolution Referendum in 'An Address on the Destitution of Scotland' (*SKP*, 19). Dunn's republicanism, however, is not free from a touch of elegiac and archaising spirit, not only linguistically, but also in attempts such as the one at 'bringing Green Breeks back, or trying to' (*SKP*, 50). His elegiac view of Scotland is particularly discernible in 'Galloway Motor Farm': 'Scotland, come back/ From the lost ground of your dismantled lands' (*SKP*, 27). Michael Hofmann says that Dunn's 'little Scotlandism' in *St Kilda's Parliament* 'has all the pathos of one man's unilateral disarmament'.[74] All in all, a kind of pacifism which is also tinted by a modest, introvert patriotism will define Dunn's political standpoint throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

In Dunn's spiritual republicanism there is a place for even the lowest forms of existence. In 'Galloway Motor Farm', he puts forward this comprehensive *Weltanschauung* in a way that is comparable to Derek Mahon's elegy for the lost mushrooms in 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford'. Sean O'Brien notes that Dunn at times offers admiring competition with contemporaries in verse, and in this case he does so with Mahon.[75] What is common between the two poets is that both wish us to recognise Virgil's '*sunt lacrimae rerum*' in our surroundings. Mahon writes of the mushrooms:

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[73] O'Donoghue, 'An Interview with Douglas Dunn', 44.
[74] Michael Hofmann, 'Two Score Years and Then' [a review of *SKP*], *Quarto*, 24 (1981), 4-5 (p. 5).
[75] O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse*, 74.

> They are begging us, you see, in their wordless way,
> To do something, to speak on their behalf
> Or at least not to close the door again.[76]

Neil Corcoran claims that in Mahon's verse the poet is 'an accidental intruder on sufferings which are not his own, but he knows they are not his own and will not claim it otherwise'.[77] The same is true for the poetry of Dunn in the 'Terry Street' sequence but certainly not in 'An Address on the Destitution of Scotland'. This outsider status is a condition of the lyrical subject that will dissolve in *Elegies*, when suffering becomes his very own. But, as we shall see in 'Reading Pascal in the Lowlands', the solitude of grief will create a distance between the poet and society, and Dunn's later work is defined by the duality of claiming kinship with the poor and a sense of withdrawal from society, or being an 'inner émigré', in the psychological sense of the term. In 'Galloway Motor Farm', an elegiac poem about locality and nationhood, Dunn describes deprivation in the inorganic universe in a manner that may be a tribute to his Irish contemporary:

> Tonight, by a steading, an iron reaper
> That once outscythed the scythe
> Is a silent cry of its materials.
> (*SKP*, 27)

Spare parts, lamp posts, paperclips, pencils, his desk and television aerials are just a few of the many commonplace objects that feature in his poetry. The general success of 'Ode: To My Socks' by the Pablo Neruda whose achievement as a public poet Dunn clearly admires may have confirmed for him the aggrandisement of the commonplace as a valid poetic approach. Jarniewicz suggests that for Dunn, because of their position

[76] Derek Mahon, 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford', in *Poems 1962-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 79-80 (p. 80).
[77] Corcoran, *English Poetry Since 1940*, 191.

in cultural hierarchy, everyday objects represent 'instances of the arbitrariness of social / cultural standards'.[78] In Dunn's uses of the *trivia*, however, the Polish critic perceives an existential leap from the particular and the social to the universal and the human:

> The commonplace acquires meaning when it is seen in relation to human existence as that part of reality that accompanies men and women in their day-to-day life, becoming a witness and a part of their biographies. The commonplace is redeemed here by showing its significance, however unacknowledged it may be, in relation to human concerns.[79]

Even lifeless material has a place in Dunn's political spiritualism (or spiritual politics), and so it does in Mahon's, who writes about 'the terminal democracy/ of hatbox and crab' in 'The Apotheosis of Tins'.[80] As for Mahon, for Dunn, what Sean O'Brien calls 'vestigial lyricism'[81] is a means of self-definition. Dunn is an admirer of, and claims to have affinities with, Mahon's poetry,[82] and describes the inclusive character of the Irish poet's verse, saying that 'Objects are metamorphosed as part of a comprehensive pathos which includes the inanimate and the human in one span of imaginative thought'.[83] Sean O'Brien contends that 'Dunn's poetic range has always been wider than Mahon's'.[84] In Dunn's poetry there is a more evident link between lyricism and nationhood than in the work of Derek Mahon. In 'An Address on the Destitution of Scotland', as O'Brien suggests, in the 'closing quotation from Auden's "Consider" national identity takes a clearer metaphoric shape'.[85] Reading 'Galloway Motor Farm', we may reasonably reverse this mindful observation. Dunn's wide and eclectic reading,

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[78] Jarniewicz, *The Uses of the Commonplace*, 120.
[79] Ibid., 121.
[80] Derek Mahon, 'The Apotheosis of Tins', in *Poems 1962-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 73-74 (p. 74).
[81] O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse*, 75.
[82] See: King, 'Three New Poets', 227; or: Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 32.
[83] Dunn, '"Let the God not abandon us"', 17.
[84] O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse*, 75.
[85] Ibid., 73.

and his capability to grasp the essence of all forms of deprivation from the lives in urban slum areas to rusting motor parts in rural Scotland, lead to his democratic and egalitarian view of human existence, which is free from the simplification and partiality of party politics.

Dunn's alertness to deprivation amplifies the elegiac current in his voice not only in his lyrical poetry, but also in other genres, such as the dramatic monologue. He carries out an interesting and highly successful experiment to combine voice and vision in his well-known 'St Kilda's Parliament: 1879-1979', which presents cultural anthropology in a visualised form. He has never been to St Kilda and the poem is based on an old photograph he saw in Theodora Fitzgibbon's cookery book *A Taste of Scotland.*[86] He emphasises the visual impact in the inspiration and the process of writing:

> It's seen mainly through the photographer's point of view. It's almost as if the photographer is meditating while looking through his lens. And he's also talking about photography in general and about the imperfect nature of his knowledge of what he prints on a plate. The poem in a way is about the uncertainty of photographic images, the extent to which the photographic image doesn't tell you anything like the whole story. To a large extent I had to imagine myself behind the lens, because the people who lived on St Kilda up until the evacuation in 1930 spoke a language that I don't speak.[87]

Crawford draws attention to the fact that the verb 'look' occurs eleven times in the poem,[88] and this confirms the speaker's sense of being an outsider. But what Corcoran describes as the poem's 'perceptual reciprocity'[89] is a significant stage in the development from the visitor's predicament to the collective responsibility of the insider:

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[86] Dunn, 'Douglas Dunn writes…', 1.
[87] O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil', 26.
[88] Crawford, 'Secret Villager', 112.
[89] Corcoran, *English Poetry Since 1940*, 154.

> Outside a parliament, looking at them,
> As they, too, must always look at me
> Looking through my apparatus at them
> Looking.
> (*SKP*, 15)

The date in the poem's title refers to the controversial 1979 Devolution Referendum, which failed to bring forward the setting up of a Scottish assembly in Edinburgh, and, as Crawford reminds us, the poem is set in a 'parliament' as far as we can possibly go from Westminster in the British Isles.[90] Dunn's description of that 'remote democracy' (*SKP*, 14) may be an implied criticism of the conservative governments at the late-1970s that also mark the inauguration of the Thatcher era. In oppositional phrases like 'They are aware of what we are up to' (*SKP*, 14), he recycles the pronominal antagonism of 'Barbarian Pastorals'. As in the 'Terry Street' sequence, visual reciprocity is not entirely free from a hint of cultural discrimination between uninformed natives and sophisticated intruders, and by proposing the riddle 'Wise men or simpletons – it is hard to tell' (*SKP*, 13), in 'St Kilda's Parliament' Dunn eventually articulates the question that haunts the reader throughout the Terry Street poems.

Reconsidering geographical outposts in the light of regionalism, Dunn's imagination bridges the gap between the local and the universal in a topographical metaphor – 'Casual husbandry upon a toehold/ Of Europe' (*SKP*, 14) – which signals his view of Scotland in Europe as expressed in *Europa's Lover*. He takes us to 'among the groans/ And sighings of a tongue' he cannot speak (*SKP*, 15). It is linguistic, rather than physical, distance that prevents Dunn (or the Photographer) from associating himself with the people of St Kilda. He provides the loss of a form of speech with an

[90] Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 294.

Ossianic parameter: 'On St. Kilda you will surely hear Gaelic/ Spoken softly like a poetry of ghosts' (*SKP*, 14). Craig links Dunn's expression 'archeology of hazelraw' (*SKP*, 14) with MacDiarmid's 'history's hazelraw' in 'The Eemis Stane'.[91] Craig also suggests that the language of the poem 'enacts a solidarity between the "English" poetry of Dunn and the Scots of MacDiarmid that defies the failure of political nationalism in assertion of cultural unity transcending divisions of language'.[92] In retrospect, the setting of Dunn's poem also establishes a bond with Edwin Morgan's 'Lady Grange on St Kilda' in the 1984 volume *Sonnets from Scotland*, which is another comprehensive statement about the autonomy of Scottish culture. But the elegiac view of linguistic diachronism and the chronological self-awareness which is expressed in a melancholic, surrealist simile ('Here I whittle time, like a dry stick', *SKP*, 15) lead to a sense of fading out of time in 'St Kilda's Parliament'. Anachronistically enough, the men of St Kilda are 'Standing there like everybody's ancestors' (*SKP*, 14). In Sean O'Brien's interview Dunn draws attention to the problem of 'historiography being worthy of distrust' and to the consequent necessity of a continuous rewriting of history.[93] Here he expresses his doubts about historiography in metaphorical terms, in the Photographer's retrospective contemplation on the inadequacy of his medium:

> Benevolent, or malign? But who,
> At this late stage, could tell, or think it worth it?
> For I was there, and am, and I forget.
> (*SKP*, 15)

So the dialectic of remembering and forgetting inherent in the problem of linguistic alienation raises the question whether it is really them (the Subjects of the photograph)

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[91] Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and British Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), 196.
[92] Ibid., 197.
[93] O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil', 26.

or perhaps us (the Barthesian Spectators of the photograph and the Readers of the poem) who are losing contact with time.

Dunn turns to another aspect of cultural history in the personal and collective elegy 'Witch-girl', which is, generically, a combination of the historical narrative and the ballad. An attempt to rewrite history may not always be a won cause, given, for instance, that the shameful event of witch burning to which the poem refers took place as recently as in 1727 in a Scotland that is proud of its long tradition of learning and philosophy. Rather than recycling public memories for more than they are worth, he indirectly speaks out against 'Kirk-sanctioned crimes'[94] and social backwardness by reworking the story of the last Scottish witch's daughter. According to the legend, after the death of her mother she wandered around Scotland and nobody saw her die. Dunn imagines the girl spiritually surviving in a spiritualised environment:

> No one to help her; no one saw her die,
> If she is dead. By Gryfe, by Deveron,
> By Cree and Tay, I see her wash her lameness,
> And hear her breathing in the wood and stone.
> (*SKP*, 23)

'Witch-girl', which also forecasts Europa's eponymous voyage, is reminiscent of Heaney's sacrificial poem 'Punishment'. Heaney may have been in the same realm of thought a little earlier than Dunn, but Dunn goes in a different direction than his Irish friend when he wants to find an objective correlative for what Crawford terms the '*anima* of Scotland'[95] in the unfortunate sister of Heaney's '[l]ittle adulteress'.[96] The girl's metamorphosis into 'wood and stone' reveals an Ovidian undercurrent in Dunn's

[94] Dunn, 'The Apple Tree' (*SKP*, 16).
[95] Crawford, 'Secret Villager', 114.
[96] Seamus Heaney, 'Punishment', in *New Selected Poems: 1966-1987* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 71-72 (p. 71).

lyricism. It is a presence that influences him from the very beginning, but does not come to surface with full strength before *Elegies*.

In 'The Harp of Renfrewshire: Contemplating a Map', Dunn offers an imaginative geographical survey of his native district. An earlier, surrealistic envisioning of Clydeside as an animated map in 'Port Logan and a Vision of Live Maps' in *Love or Nothing* represents an analogous example for the cartographic aspect of his landscape poetry. His loyalty to place is deeply infused with a sense of egalitarianism that harks back to the concerns of 'Barbarian Pastorals': 'on my map is neither wall or fence,/ But men and women' (*SKP*, 30). A map is a significant emblem of regional solidarity for Dunn. He regards it as 'a kind of ECG, a graph of the vital impulses of the land'.[97] A shared form of speech is perhaps the most important token of a large-scale solidarity. The absence of what we may call the 'givenness' of language does not pose a problem for most writers whose first language is one or another variety of English. In its various forms, English has developed into not only the mother tongue of millions across five continents, but also into an impersonal medium of communication, a *lingua franca* of international politics and business. 'The Harp of Renfrewshire' is heavily laden with metaphors from, or allusions to, the various fields of linguistics: phonetics, orthography and etymology. If Dunn associates topography with cultural and economic repression in *Barbarians*, now his identification of territory with language in phrases like 'Land-language', 'Ground's secret lexicon' and 'patronymic miles of grass' (*SKP*, 30) is a form of expressing his regional commitment. The link between region and dialect functions in a similar way throughout his career, only from around the second half of the 1980s the geographical area to which he commits himself is North-East Fife. Cartography and language as expounded upon in

[97] Douglas Dunn, 'Clyde and Cheek', *Vole*, 2.1 (1978), 27-30 (p. 30).

'The Harp of Renfrewshire' also inspired Brian Friel's *Translations*, which illustrates that, to use Elmer Andrews's words, language 'may not be a simple mirror or window on the world, but neither is it a completely arbitrary and relative Saussurian system of signs with no positive terms'.[98] In Scotland, from a Celtic point of view, William Neill's 'Map Makers' considers language and ideology in similar terms, and demonstrates that a careless (or perhaps deliberate) distortion of place-names has formed a part of the cultural colonisation of Gaelic-speaking territories. Neill's metaphors imply that the rationalisation or indifferent misrepresentation of ancient names (it depends on your point of view what you will call it) has proved an apocalyptic event in the history of the Gael:

> The cold men in the city
> who circumscribe all latitude
> wiped their bullseye glasses
> laid down the stabbing pens
> that had dealt the mortal wounds
> slaying the history of a thousand years
> in the hour between lunch and catching the evening train.[99]

For Dunn, national and regional identities meet in language. In 'The Local' he gives voice to a less reassuring consideration of regionalism. The poem does not identify the place, and so it may be seen as a general interpretation of post-British northern identities. The way he combines regionalism and language in an anthropomorphic metaphor suggests an incurable sense of parochialism:

> we stand
> In this armpit of English vernacular,
> Hopelessly in touch with where we are.
> (*SKP*, 41)

[98] Elmer Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel: Neither Reality Nor Dreams* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 170.
[99] William Neill, 'Map makers', in *Wild Places: Poems in Three Leids* (Barr: Luath Press, 1985), 10.

In the 'provincial' context of the poem's locality – 'Here, humbly, off a High Street in the North' – the religious quotation '*Placebo Domino in regione vivorum*' (*SKP*, 41) sounds sardonic.[100] Rather than with a commendable existence, the kind of elegiac localism he portrays in a man 'muttering his faulty tales/ Of Burma in the last days of its Raj' (*SKP*, 40) can be aligned with the post-imperial state of depression of the northern regions as staged earlier in 'Ships' (*TS*, 59). If in 'The Local' Dunn is elegiac about provincial communities, then 'Monumental Sculptor', on the basis of the second meaning of 'monumental' in the dictionary ('very large and impressive'), can be seen as a larger-than-life churchyard elegy for Scotland. It is probably difficult for a Scottish poet to write about gravestones after MacDiarmid's 'The Eemis Stane' without either lapsing into imitation or being eclipsed by the greatness of MacDiarmid's lyric. For Dunn, the planting of gravestones with 'a genuflecting crane' (*SKP*, 29) develops into the image of a negative building site, implying that with the increasing number of stones an old way of life disappears. In linguistic metaphors, such as 'His hammered catalogue of names/ Is the stone book of his town', 'alphabets/ Of memory and consolation' and 'cut languages', he draws attention to the importance of a continuing linguistic identity so as to withstand oblivion.

Local and large-scale affinities supplement each other in *Europa's Lover*. The repeated affirmation of Scotland's role in Europe has its roots in an uncertainty that can be distinguished from the identity crisis observable among the modern European nations. Crawford suggests that the current political emphasis on the long history of Scotland's pronounced European identity may be regarded as 'a way of outflanking Anglocentric pressures within the British State, and as a device to celebrate Scotland's

[100] "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps. 116: 9; VgPs. 114:9).

aloofness from the prevailing politics of Westminster'.[101] Christopher Harvie voices a different opinion when he suggests that 'Scots hostility to London government [...] has become such that "Europeanism" now almost resembles a cargo-cult, an emotional resource, like supporting West Germany against England in the World Cup'.[102] Scotland's Europeanness has had strong cultural foundations but its political and economic dimension has been ambiguous. As Harvie reminds us, Neal Acherson pointed out that 'Scotland's place among the "advanced" regions of Europe is uncertain', and adds that when its political structure and urban development are concerned, the country is 'more of a "socialist state" than anything else to be found west of the Urals'.[103] However, modern Scottish cultural and national identities, which have been determined by the experience of existing in a supra-ethnic union for three centuries, and have evolved along with the recognition and utilisation of a (not always unproblematic) ethnic and linguistic plurality, may provide an instructive basis for a case study in the functioning of multiple solidarities. Schlesinger refers to Étienne Balibar as arguing that with the devolution of centralised governments the modern European state has come to be 'neither national nor supranational' and this political ambivalence may be identified as the source of a new '*identity panic*'.[104] Schlesinger adds:

> the supranationalist quest of the European Community is compelling us to rethink the nature of the nation-state, a political, economic and cultural entity that is identity-conferring. European statehood [...] will finally change the scope of contemporary conceptions of citizenship: the rights and duties of

[101] Robert Crawford, 'Dedefining Scotland', in *Studying British Cultures*, ed. by Susan Bassnett (London: Routledge, 1997), 83-96 (p. 88).
[102] Christopher Harvie, *Cultural Weapons: Scotland and Survival in Europe*, Determinations Series (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), 33.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Philip Schlesinger, 'Europeanness: A New Cultural Battlefield?', in: *Nationalism*, ed. by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, Oxford Readers Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 316-25 (p. 318).

> citizens will be redefined and the scope of allegiances shifted. They will need to become actively multifold.[105]

At this point it is worth remembering Linden Peach's definition of 'multilayered and international identities', which, in fact, is an upgrading of earlier ideas. In Anglophone cultural criticism T. S. Eliot introduced this idea by saying that the 'unity of culture, in contrast to the unity of political organization, does not require us all to have only one loyalty: it means that there will be a variety of loyalties'.[106]

In general, there is a complex interplay between local and international affinities in Dunn's work. *Europa's Lover* is set in a provincial town but Europa's taste would not allow her wearing anything worse than a 'subtle décolletage' made in Paris by 'surrealist seamstresses' (*SP*, 211),[107] and her attention spans from the 'banks of a Scandinavian lake' (*SP*, 221) to 'Shadowy Prague' (*SP*, 224). In 1982, when *Europa's Lover* appeared, Dunn edited *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull*, an anthology, published in Newcastle, of young poets living in Hull, and *To Build a Bridge: A Celebration in Verse of Humberside and Its Bridge*, another local anthology which appeared in Lincoln. He also published two short stories that would be collected in *Secret Villages*, a panorama of small-town and rural Scotland. Parallel to that, in the same year a number of his poems were translated into various Eastern European languages: Polish, Slovene and Macedonian.[108] He is one of those poets from the British Isles who, in the face of a conservative Little Englandism that Philip Larkin

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[105] Ibid., 321.
[106] T. S. Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture' [extracts], in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 292-305 (p. 305).
[107] References are made to the text as reprinted in: Douglas Dunn, *Selected Poems 1964-1983* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 209-28. In the original 1982 Bloodaxe pamphlet the page numbers are not indicated.
[108] See: James Kidd, 'Bibliography' [a bibliography of Douglas Dunn's works, 1965-1992], in *Reading Douglas Dunn*, ed. by Robert Crawford and David Kinloch, Modern Scottish Writers Series (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1992), 182-285 (p. 240).

advertised not long ago, are susceptible to developments in the European history of literature.

Dunn is not afraid of the loss of national identities in a European melting-pot with the advent of the European Union. He said recently, 'I don't believe it's necessary for *any* national identity to undergo significant erosion as a result of the tendency towards European unity'.[109] The dialogue of nationalism and internationalism is deeply infused with the dialectic of unity and diversity in the European history of ideas. A European unity based on the principle of unity-in-diversity has been the subject of political proposals since at least the seventeenth century. In his *Essay Towards the Present and Future Peace of Europe* (1693), William Penn professes the idea of universal peace based on a common European identity, whereas in *Siécle de Louis XIV* (1751) Voltaire notes that although Europe is a 'great republic divided into several states', in one way or other these states 'all correspond [...] with one other'.[110] The notion of a common identity emerges again and again in history, and in the twentieth century Eliot made another major attempt to grasp the essence of Europeanness. Like Voltaire, he takes the concept of unity-in-diversity as his point of departure:

> it is necessary to be clear about what we mean by "culture", so that we may be clear about the distinction between the material organization of Europe, and the spiritual organism of Europe. [...] I have already affirmed that there can be no "European" culture if the several countries are isolated from each other: I add now that there can be no European culture if these countries are reduced to identity. We need variety in unity: not the unity of organization, but the unity of nature.[111]

[109] Dósa, 'A Different Drummer', 30.
[110] Cited in: Dennis Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968), 119; 123.
[111] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture', 302.

Dunn would say Eliot is on 'the Tory side of history' (*WTD*, 96) when the great Modernist identifies Christianity, the Roman Law and 'our common standards of literature' as the corner-stones of European identity. Dunn perceives the hermeneutic dialogue with literature as a democratic and potentially endless, even transcendental, phenomenon, and, as a poet, he is interested in what is universally human, and would never simplify it into categories: 'Even if different cultural traditions condition them differently, it has to be said that [...] feelings [associated with love, death, places etc.] are human more than national'.[112]

*Europa's Lover* is inspired by the eponymous myth of our continent, which originates in ancient Greece, and has come down to us through Latin culture. The story of Europa, a Phoenician princess who became the mother of Zeus's three sons, is first mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*, and is also referred to in Hesiod's *Catalogues* and Eumelus's *Europeia.* But the connection between Europe and the mythological princess has been challenged since the earliest times: the Homeric 'Hymn to Apollo' calls only the Greek mainland 'Europe' as opposed to the islands; and Herodotus uses the myth to explain the enmity between Greeks and barbarians in *The Histories*. Horace made the idea of associating Europa with our continent popular in his *Odes*, whereas the best known account of the divine love affair is found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and the Latin poet also makes a reference to Europa in his *Fasti*. Both Horace and Ovid are enduring influences in Dunn's poetry. The most evident consequence of the myth of Europa is that in the arts Europe has been imaginatively identified as a female figure.

Dunn's poem is part narrated and part spoken by Europa, the young-and-old woman, who is the incarnation of our continent:

[112] Dósa, 'A Different Drummer', 28.

'Sit by me,' said the Lady.
'You will suffer and travel
Thousands of years with me
Through my archives of sun and rain,
My annals of rivers and earth.'
(*SP*, 211)

But the voices of the poet and Europa meet, intersect, and then split up again at certain points, so that at times it is almost impossible to identify the speaker. We may be justified in reading the poem both as a narrative and as a dramatic monologue. The combination of the narrative and the series of monologues as sampled in *Europa's Lover* will become a central technique in *Elegies*. Europa's speech changes into a catalogue of historical events, movements and dynasties in a diachronic mapping of European culture and society. In Crawford's interpretation, Dunn wants to create 'a trans-historical land-voice, [...] a voice of Europe'.[113] Craig also comments on Dunn's historical sensibility, saying that 'Europe defines itself retrospectively', and goes on to argue that for Dunn 'the imagination must also work backwards, reversing into reality, exploring the present through the languages of the past'.[114] We might add that a similar 'forwards in reverse' technique determines the narrative structure of *Elegies*, and, from *Love or Nothing* on, an interest in the past and its various (social, cultural and psychological) connotations typically defines Dunn's poetry.

A kind of hedonism which includes amorous and gastronomic pleasures forms a part of European identity, and is usually associated with the Mediterranean peoples and also with the French nation. Crawford takes *Europa's Lover* as an expression of Dunn's 'European and hedonistic sensibility'.[115] 'For a Scottish writer, I suppose I'm hedonistic', Dunn remarks in Sean O'Brien's interview.[116] Dunn's love of French

[113] Crawford, 'Secret Villager', 119.
[114] Craig, 'Northlight', 61.
[115] Crawford, 'Secret Villager', 119.
[116] O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil', 27.

things, from literature to landscape, and from the weather to cuisine, is known among his friends and students.[117] On receipt of the Somerset Maugham award, in 1972 he spent a few months with his first wife in southern France, and even considered settling down there.[118] He had an opportunity to extend his knowledge of French literature by reading, among other writers, Camus, Sartre and Nizan. He was probably also interested in the European dimension of their work. He described Robert Desnos as 'classically European, [...] like my other heroes, Camus and Nizan' in Haffenden's interview (first published in 1979) when he was working on *Europa's Lover*.[119] From around the early 1970s on, Frenchness has proved a significant presence in his poetry: 'The White Poet', an homage to Jules Laforgue, was collected in *Love or Nothing*; in 'Barbarian Pastorals' Dunn takes his epigraphs from Nizan and Camus; in *St Kilda's Parliament* we find an imaginary conversation with Rimbaud in 'The Miniature Métro' and an ode to the popular French food in 'Ratatouille'; and around one fifth of the poems in *Elegies* is concerned with France. He revisited French literature in the late-1980s when he was commissioned to translate Racine's *Andromaque*. But, compared to his use of literary allusions, in his poetry Frenchness is more attractive, because it is more spontaneous, when he writes about quotidian experience: food, cooking and other 'ordinary joys'.

Eroticism defines not only generalisations or stereotypes about European identity in popular thinking but, as an aesthetic property, it irrefutably shapes the development of European literary history from Homer and Sappho through Petrarch

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[117] For a comprehensive discussion of Dunn's interest in French culture, see: David Kinloch, '"The Music inside Fruit": Douglas Dunn and France', in *Reading Douglas Dunn*, ed. by Robert Crawford and David Kinloch, Modern Scottish Writers Series (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1992), 151-67.

[118] Jane Stabler, 'Biography' [a biography of Douglas Dunn], in *Reading Douglas Dunn*, ed. by Robert Crawford and David Kinloch, Modern Scottish Writers Series (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 1-16 (p. 10).

[119] Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 29.

and Villon to the modern times. Illustrations of the myth of Europa normally have a strong erotic charge and feminine sensuality is also a vital ingredient in *Europa's Lover*: 'It was the shape of her ankle/ That first suggested I desired her' (*SP*, 222). As in *Elegies*, the female figure is more than a protagonist: she is both the source of inspiration and the subject matter. Dunn's self-consciously undertaken and gentle treatment of femininity is a precious colour in a Scottish literature that is seen by many as, often oppressively, masculine. Corcoran draws attention to the significance of 'a quietly feminist anti-machismo' throughout his work, and goes on to suggest that the feminine element 'reaches its apogee' in *Europa's Lover*.[120] But femininity in Dunn's poetry should also be seen as a psychological discovery of the woman inside rather than merely as an ideological reaction to the masculinity of Scottish culture. Love and womanhood have had a purified spiritual perspective in Dunn's writing from the start. He elevates ordinary working-class women in 'The Clothes Pit': 'Three girls go down the street with the summer wind' (*TS*, 13); 'Celtica' describes the mysterious survival of 'a nation's beauty' in the female principle from the mythical times into the age of technology (*HL*, 30); and in 'Rose' he projects love and the attempt to preserve it from oblivion, a major concern in *Elegies*, into the floral existence (*SKP*, 34-5). In Part X of *Europa's Lover* he describes an introspective, nearly religious, experience of love:

> In love, I've felt love like anatomy
> In meditation on itself, its real
> And predatory contemplations, whether
> Pure and languid or disturbed by lust.
> (*SP*, 222)

The attempt at the elevation of love from the everyday into the transcendental is more apparent in *Elegies*. Around 1980 he was already in the same realm of feeling. He first

[120] Corcoran, *English Poetry Since 1940*, 157.

mentions working on the poem, then called 'Dead Lady', in King's *Nine Contemporary Poets*.[121] He started publishing the poems of *Elegies* in 1981, that is at about the same time as *Europa's Lover* went into print. Spiritualism, which has been present in his verse from the beginning, then, only intensified around the turn of the 1970s and 1980s.

Dunn provides *Europa's Lover* with another spiritual dimension by including Christianity in his archives of European culture. Christianity is described as an anachronistic repository of sterile knowledge in Part III:

> Cold scholars in a christendom,
> We are the children of children.
> When was it in traditions that
> We stopped living? When did we die?
> (*SP*, 213)

In the history of ideas, Europe has been identified with Christianity from the earliest times. Hay notes that for Dante and Petrarch the intended meaning of Europe is 'akin to the sense we have associated with "Christendom"'.[122] Neither does Pascal distinguish between the two concepts in his philosophical meditation *Pensées*, which is mentioned in Dunn's 'Reading Pascal in the Lowlands' in *Elegies*. In his 1799 essay *Die Christenheit oder Europa: Ein Fragment*, Novalis follows the same train of thought, and Eliot, too, describes Christianity as one of the foundations of European culture.[123] But if Novalis expected a renewal of the Christian spirit in the late-eighteenth century, for Dunn religion has become irrelevant. Indeed, what I term spiritualism in Dunn's poetry has almost nothing to do with Christianity, not even in *Elegies*, which concerns death, the most significant passage in Christian theology.

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[121] King, 'Three New Poets', 227.
[122] Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*, 59.
[123] Eliot, 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture', 304.

*Europa's Lover* exhibits a uniquely autonomous and subtle amalgam made of a quasi-barbaric nature worship, classical perceptions of an animated nature (as in Ovid) and the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation:

> 'Now you have died once, you will die again,
> And live again. At your own funerals
> You will stand among the trees
> And grieve for your progeny and future selves.'
> (*SP*, 212);

and its contemporaneous version in Part IV:

> Many times we have risen
> From the earthen delicatessen
> Of the cemeteries [...]
> disappearing
> Into salutations of light and water
> At the foot of elaborate gardens
> Where leaves are burned
> In a dusk-rinsed smoke.
> (*SP*, 214)

In *Elegies* these elements meld into a pagan interpretation of pantheism, in which the recognition of spiritual things in nature leads to a surmise of existential secrets. The stylistic concomitant of this quasi-religious state of mind in Dunn's verse is surrealism. As pointed out above, O'Donoghue estimates Dunn's pre-*Elegies* use of the surreal as 'a holiday from responsibility', but derives the 'mystical authority' and luxurious vocabulary in *Elegies* from Dunn's 'surrealist side'.[124] Corcoran reconciles the apparent tension between realist and surrealist techniques by suggesting that *Europa's Lover* is written 'in a style phantasmagorically gnomic and lucidly precise, and therefore effecting the most secure bridge Dunn has yet erected between the almost separable

[124] O'Donoghue, 'Moving Towards a Vernacular of Compassion', 45.

kinds of poetry he has written'.[125] As far as Dunn's nostalgic and pagan mysticism is concerned, in English literature Hardy could be his next of kin, although Dunn admires the 'short-story-writer-in-verse' rather than the mystic in him. But in its combination of the visionary and the political in the universal plot of history, *Europa's Lover* could be the inheritor of Blake's 'Europe: A Prophecy'.

In his review of *Europa's Lover* Tim Dooley suggests that here Dunn 'derives hope from the submerging of individuality in a genderless eroticism [...] and from a vision [...] of a world which has abandoned national identities'.[126] But it would be a misleading simplification of Dunn's intentions to identify the state of what he calls being '[r]eleased from nationality' (*SP*, 224) as renouncing national identity. He composed *Europa's Lover* at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s but an earlier version of Part III had been published under the title 'Scriptoria Furniture' in 1974.[127] But, in order to illustrate the spiritual dimension of his perception of nationality, we need to go forward in time. When in a later essay he suggests that 'Edwin Muir's timeless, balladic poetry affirms a connection between modern Scotland and its eternal identity, in spite of, or perhaps because of, his European subjects' (*WTD*, 86), Dunn translates Muir's 'eternal identity' of Scotland into a European context not merely in political, but also in highly subjective spiritual terms. Dunn's quasi-metaphysical view of literature stems from a conventional *Kunsttheorie*. He pronounces the conviction that 'Art, no matter how specific in its history, aspires to timelessness' (*WTD*, 101). Here he speaks out on behalf of an enduring philosophical tradition, which culminates in Georg Lukács's *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst*. For Dunn the poet, nationality is a complex frame of convictions and experiences which potentially includes spirituality and cannot be

[125] Corcoran, *English Poetry Since 1940*, 157.
[126] Tim Dooley, 'Magnificence and Mourning' [a review of *EL*], *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 August 1983, p. 886.
[127] Douglas Dunn, 'Scriptoria Furniture', *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 July 1974, p. 762.

simplified as, or translated into, the contexts of political actuality and other ideological conflicts.

Dunn's image of Europe has political parameters only as long as he raises his voice against economic and ideological exploitation, and refuses to identify with undemocratic systems of government. In the same way as 'Barbarian Pastorals', *Europa's Lover* has its epigraphs from Camus and Nizan. Paul Nizan is usually described as a communist writer, and so the epigraph from him automatically provides the poem with a leftist overtone. Dooley reads the poem as a celebration of 'post-imperial Europe', and suggests that while 'Dunn recognizes that the ways in which Europeans see their lives vary according to geographical and historical locations, a common sense of European identity can be derived from shared economic experience'.[128] Beside Parts VI and VIII, Dunn describes a shared identity that arises from an international abuse of wealth and workforce in Part XIII:

> Exports of British, French,
> Spaniards and Portuguese,
> Exports of all Europe
> For wealth and colonies,
> From terror and pauperdom,
> Dutch, German, Jew and Pole,
> Sicilian and Florentine,
> Magyar, Greek and Slav,
> The Scandinavians.
> (*SP*, 226)

Corcoran estimates Dunn's democratic sentiment in *Barbarians* as 'a libertarian socialism in which a yearning for the purely fictive, and for various types of imaginative repletion, also have their place',[129] and I suggest that the same may be true for *Europa's Lover*. But, being aware that the earlier communist states of Central and

[128] Dooley, 'Magnificence and Mourning', 886.
[129] Corcoran, *English Poetry Since 1940*, 157.

Eastern Europe, some of which even approved of Mrs. Thatcher's politics, also designated themselves as Socialist, that term again seems mildly restrictive to a reader from those parts of the continent. Dooley's description of the poem as the achievement of 'a libertarian democratic imagination'[130] seems to me subtler, and is consonant with the view of Dunn's European *Geist* as put forward in this thesis.

Republicanism, which has become an essential motivation for Dunn's verse in *Barbarians* and *St Kilda's Parliament*, is also a major imaginative force in *Europa's Lover*. In poetic terms, Craig points out that in his democratic fusing of the classical motive with a regional and potentially lower-class consciousness Dunn demonstrates that our multicultural Europe, and within that the modern multicultural Scotland, is 'the inheritor equally of the classical ideal and of a vernacular idiom'.[131] Dunn's omnipresent republicanism, which even pervades the inorganic universe in 'Galloway Motor Farm', now receives a Voltairean amplitude of inclusiveness and fraternity, but without ever forfeiting a transcendental dimension:

> 'They are our people, too.
> Released from nationality
> They are fraternal
> In the hoax of afterlife,
> Snug among the alluvials
> In the republic of Europe.'
> (*SP*, 224)

He professes the universal code of liberty, equality and fraternity without subscribing to one or another political agenda. Affirming a gentle but resolute humanism, he describes a vision that parallels the historical self-emancipation of the Hegelian *Weltgeist*, an incarnation of which could be his Europa, in the ultimate part:

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[130] Dooley, 'Magnificence and Mourning', 886.
[131] Craig, 'From the Lost Ground', 370.

'I shall re-write the books of equity,
Engender passion, justice, love and truth
And weave a fabric of persuasive virtue.'
(*SP*, 228)

In conclusion, as his republicanism, Dunn's European sensibility is comprehensive. His attention spans across history, geography and the whole cross-section of society and he is at home equally 'by nocturnal taxi ranks', on 'the steps of the Opera House' and 'on the corners of unmapped rural lanes', and includes both the provincial and the urban: 'We are at home in any occasion of/ Citizens, urbanal and pastoral' (*SP*, 214). In his *Letters on the Regicide Peace* (1796), Edmund Burke illustrated the spiritual homogeneity of European culture by saying that 'No European can be a complete exile in any part of Europe'.[132] The epigraph from Nizan suggests a comparable sense of cosmopolitanism without identity conflicts in *Europa's Lover*: 'Men make more than one native land for themselves. There are some who feel at home in twenty corners of the world, for men are born more than once' (*SP*, 210). As the chosen epigraph reveals, internationalism is provided with a spiritual dimension in Dunn's imagination. Elsewhere he describes the poetic instinct as not only rising from 'mysterious, subjective, eccentric, unpredictable and irrational sources', but, he suggests, 'to consider them is to find yourself led back to mystery, self, strangeness and the unreasonable' (*WTD*, 84). In consequence, if considered from the viewpoint of the lyrical poet, Dunn's inner dialogue between national and international identities should necessarily remain unaccountable. Yet it is certain that this mysterious force of spiritual republicanism has formed, and continues to shape, his sensibility of a Scottish and European poet.

[132] Cited in Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*, 123.

# Chapter Three

# Aphrodite Scotia

### Spiritual landscapes and lyricism in *Elegies*

Dunn can be an evasive poet when nationality is concerned and I do not doubt that the context of national poetics can be irrelevant to the recording of love and grief, which are universal and reside in the most private spheres of emotion. Yet we can find some obvious traces of his Scottish cultural identity in *Elegies*. This chapter sets out to account for the ways in which the Scottish dimension of Dunn's poetic sensibility is reflected within the personal narrative of *Liebestod*, and I also include some international references in my discussion of the literary context of *Elegies*. Finally, I investigate how the physical landscape of Scotland affected the imagined, spiritual scenery of the book, paving the way for Dunn's identity construction of the Scottish nation through metaphorical, aesthetic apprehensions of place and history in *Northlight*.

*Elegies* is dedicated to the memory of Dunn's first wife, Lesley, who died of cancer in 1981. The book received the Whitbread Prize, which may be seen as an act of official recognition on the part of the British literary establishment. By then, Dunn had been living out of Scotland for nearly two decades, and reviewers who dealt with *Elegies* allocated him a seat in the English division of the hall of the famous poets, among the likes of Hardy and Tennyson. No wonder, then, as he remembers, that his success was at that time regarded at least with suspicion among the Scottish literati:

> In Scotland I suspect it was resented. It was thought that I'd disturbed the pecking order, and besides, *it wasn't in Scots; it wasn't even conspicuously Scottish at all.* It didn't win any of the Scottish prizes![1]

Dunn argues against the relevance of Scottish identity to the book when he says in the same interview: 'Given the nature of the book's subject, there's a temptation to say "Yes, it stands on a *higher plateau.*" But it wouldn't be right. I don't live in the past'.[2] The temporal dissociation from Scottish concerns in *Elegies* was forecast a few years back, in *Europa's Lover*. But again we can discern the same kind of dichotomy in his involvement as earlier: if regionalism in the contemporaneous publication of the anthology of Hull poets, *A Rumoured City*, had counterbalanced internationalism in *Europa's Lover*, then so did nationality and a sense of community in his 1985 collection of short stories, *Secret Villages*, contrast privacy in *Elegies*.

In retrospect, Cairns Craig describes *Elegies* as a break in Dunn's poetic journey back to Scotland.[3] In a contemporary interview Dunn suggested that whether 'what happened interrupted the direction my poetry might have taken after *St Kilda's Parliament* is beside the point'.[4] But there are inevitable discontinuities as well as continuities in *Elegies*. Morrison estimates Dunn's move 'away from a poetry concerned with class, history and culture' as the most certain break with his earlier collections.[5] Morrison records 'the imaginary landscapes, with their odd mix of the "Ovidian and Gaelic", the lush and the barren, the dandyishly French and the austerely Scottish' as an apparent continuity,[6] to which we might add other features. These surely include in poetic terms Dunn's characteristic relish in images of snow,

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[1] O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil', 33.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Craig, 'From the Lost Ground', 365.
[4] O'Donoghue, 'An Interview with Douglas Dunn', 47.
[5] Blake Morrison, 'Narratives of Grief' [a review of *E*], *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 April 1985, p. 377.
[6] Ibid.

his interest in vegetative existence and light effects, as well as a visual-perspectivist representation. In stylistic terms, he continues to deploy an expensively ornamented poetic language, and is ambitious to achieve a short-story like character in the poems. These long-developed poetic and stylistic devices not only provided him with a path to follow, but, as he says, to 'have broken away from them would have been insincere, technically, and probably in feeling as well'.[7]

The most significant continuity, which also proved psychologically beneficial for Dunn during the writing of these poems, is the resumption in *Elegies* of his earlier technical concerns. In formal respects this book also displays some maturing tendencies in his verse: an increasing emphasis on formal discipline and the perfection of versification, which arises from his self-confident handling of both traditional and innovative forms. On the one hand, formalism is by nature associated with the genre. In ancient Greek poetry the term 'elegy' referred to the metre rather than the subject matter of a poem: an elegy had to be written in distichs, that is in alternating hexameters and pentameters. It is only since about the sixteenth century that the term has come to indicate a poem of mourning or a lament. After a few attempts to imitate the classical distichs, elegies were written in iambic couplets and various other bound forms but there has never developed a fixed form for this genre in English-language poetry. On the other hand, formalism gains prominence in elegy writing less because of tradition than the intensity of emotion, as rhyme and metre may help to promote the articulation of feeling. John Donne refers to this use of versification in 'The Triple Foole': 'Grief brought to numbers cannot be so fierce;/ For he tames it, that fetters it in verse'.[8] Dunn describes the same impetus when he

[7] O'Donoghue, 'An Interview with Douglas Dunn', 48.
[8] John Donne, 'The Triple Foole', in *The Elegies and Songs and Sonnets*, ed. by Helen Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 52.

says that form 'lends you a hand that guides your feelings into clarity and lyricism, and it tells you when you've found something truly mysterious, then you should leave it alone, even at the expense of technique'.[9] This also accounts for the presence of free verse in *Elegies*. The majority of free forms reveal the underlying principles of, or loosely follow, certain types of versification. The lines in the longer free poems are very often iambic pentameter-based, and their lengths usually vary between eight and fourteen syllables according to syntactic patterns. Most of the shorter poems consist of nine to fifteen unrhymed lines, and some of these are patterned upon the structure of the Italian sonnet, as for example 'The Sundial' and 'Listening'. This is not a novelty in Dunn's formal practice: among other poems, 'A Dream of Judgement' in *Terry Street*, 'The Friendship of Young Poets' in *The Happier Life*, and 'Dominies' in *St Kilda's Parliament* expose a similar strategy in versification. There is also a variety of strict forms: he uses rhymed quatrains in 'Birch Room' and 'Empty Wardrobes', and regular quintets in 'Writing with Light'. 'Dining' is written in distichs with alternating rhymes, and 'Land Love', 'A Rediscovery of Juvenilia' and 'Hush' are in triplets. The reader also finds Italian sonnets, iambic pentameters, blank verse, and a range of conventional and innovative rhyme schemes.

'"Write out of me, not out of what you read"': the advice of Dunn's wife, recorded in the ultimate line of 'Tursac' (*E*, 26), stands at the junction of the book's interests. Lesley's distinction between direct and indirect experience is a dimension of *Elegies* Dunn did not intend to explore. We might add this opposition between art and life to other apparent dichotomies in his poetry: to those between the public and the private considerations of art, between lyricism and social responsibility, or

[9] G. Elliot, 'Douglas Dunn' [an interview], *Winthrop II: The Poetry Ephemeral*, 4 June 1986, 11-12 (p. 11).

between involvement and seclusion. But he denies he was interested in this division: 'I don't think I was thinking about "art and life" as that's understood as a term in literary criticism'.[10] I do not assume that an oppositional approach is internal to *Elegies* in the way it is to the 'Terry Street' sequence or to 'Disenchantments' in *Dante's Drum-kit*. The conflict between art and life reveals itself indirectly, through Dunn's unspoken doubt in *Elegies*: is poetry an appropriate means of commemorating the loved one? In Lyon's opinion, Dunn resists 'the sophisticated intertextuality [...], in order to fulfil his wife's simple advice'.[11] But a single line does not necessarily support the interpretation of what is a larger symmetry. Dunn does not obey the advice inasmuch as he includes literature as another source of inspiration beside his main source, the memory of Lesley's exemplary living. He transcends the dialectic of direct and indirect experience through combining life and literature right in the first poem, in 'Re-reading Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories*', where textual allusions open up elucidating links between his own poems and Mansfield's stories. The dialogue between *Elegies* and other texts appears on various levels. On the primary level, there is a network of cross-references within the book itself: it mainly consists of a complex web of motifs and recurring images, colours and visual effects. On another level, in retrospect, we find a broader dialogue within Dunn's own work pointing both backward, for example to 'The Return' in *Barbarians* and to *Europa's Lover*, and forward, to 'At Falkland Palace' and 'Apples' in *Northlight*. Finally, from outside Dunn's verse there are textual inclusions from sources as diverse as Pascal, the Nobel laureate Giosuè Carducci, W. B. Yeats, John Donne and Katherine Mansfield. Additionally, his stylistic references

[10] Crawford, 'Douglas Dunn Talking with Robert Crawford', 31.
[11] J. M. Lyon, 'The Art of Grief', *English*, 40 (1991), 47-67 (p. 50).

include Ovid and Thomas Hardy. Most of these sources point in the direction of secular spirituality, and a belief in a metaphysical survival of love.

Presenting the narrative of a happy marriage as well as grief, *Elegies* performs what Dunn proposes in the introductory poem, in 'Re-reading Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories*': 'I flick/ Through all our years' (*E*, 9). The book narrates what can be reconstructed as a coherent story. And although the events are not represented in a strict chronological order, we can recover the full story, which John Osborne sums up as:

> the poet a full-time writer, his wife running an art-gallery; the diagnosis of cancer in the eye [...]; the fatal spread of the disease [...]; her death; the funeral arrangements and the wake; the poet's memories of past joys, especially when holidayed in France; his return to Scotland for six weeks; [...] return to Hull and a house haunted by her presence; wintry days and the regular marking of the anniversary of her death; finally, after a jump in the story, a poem entitled 'Leaving Dundee', whose closing lines may be interpreted as an invitation to the poet's new *fiancée* to join him in Hull.[12]

As Lyon notes, 'the stages of grief do not form a linear progression'.[13] Rather than a chronology of events, the poems follow the chronology of grief, which is a universal psychological process. In retrospect, Dunn describes the course of his feelings: 'grief is an intense and extreme state of mind. For weeks it excludes all else. Guilt is a common sensation among survivors... Slowly, though, you realise that living, with all that it entails, need not dishonour the past and the love that lives there'.[14]

Though it may seem unduly critical to articulate a diagrammatic structure to such a painfully emotional work, it may add to our apprehension of the book's

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[12] John Osborne, 'The Hull Poets', *Bête Noire*, Spring (1987), 180-204 (p. 193).
[13] Lyon, 'The Art of Grief', 50.
[14] Douglas Dunn, 'Regained: The Light Behind Grief's Dark Veil', *Glasgow Herald*, 24 September 1985, p. 9.

dynamic if we realise that it can be divided into the following thematic units in line with the psychological development of grief: 'Re-reading Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories*' and 'The Butterfly House' introduce the main themes; the poems from 'Second Opinion' to 'Arrangements' describe Lesley's illness and death; the poems from 'A Silver Air Force' to 'Creatures' involve remembering the dead wife; the pieces from 'Pretended Homes' to 'Hush' narrate grief and its transformation; and finally 'Leaving Dundee' expresses consolation. As every division, this one, too, is arbitrary and unjustifiable unless it can promote an understanding of the narrative scheme. Although the poems can be read individually, the seamless composition renders *Elegies* a transition between a poem sequence and a long poem, while there are also small sequences and germs of sequences within the larger symmetry. The homogeneity of the composition counterbalances the heterogeneity of form and subject matter. The narrative of grief, combined with a frame structure and a network of images and motifs, earns a rare aesthetic unity. It may be interesting to notice that in my proposed division where the sections meet in each case there is a longer meditative poem: 'The Butterfly House' between the first and the second sections; 'Arrangements' between the second and the third; and 'Pretended Homes' between the third and the fourth. In the first two poems of the book, which represent a future time compared to the poems that follow, Dunn interprets the events of the past from a retrospectively omniscient position, and introduces some of the motifs which will act as a cohesive force in the following part of the narrative. The distancing effect of time acquires a shape in the subsequent poems, from 'Second Opinion' to 'Arrangements', which relate the last period of her illness and her death. The recollection and preservation of the past becomes the main concern of the poems from 'A Silver Air Force' to 'Creatures'. The same aspect is even more dominant in the poems from 'Pretended Homes' to 'Hush', where Dunn

gradually turns his attention to the present, and describes the gradual transformation of his feelings from despair through an occasional renewal of pain to the spiritualisation of the experience and a lyrical conviction of her metaphysical afterlife. The ultimate poem represents the climax of that process, and calms down the four year long disturbance by a quiet acceptance of the emotional heritage of the past as well as an anticipation of the future.

The first two poems in *Elegies* serve as an exposition. In 'Re-reading Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories*' and 'The Butterfly House' Dunn introduces the book's two main generating factors: the recollection of memories and story telling. Recollection not only defines the poet's narrative position, but is also the subject matter of the first poem. Re-reading Mansfield's book of short stories, he comes upon some reminders from the past in the form of a pressed fly, 'a skeleton of gauze', and an unused bus ticket: 'I did not come home that Friday' (*E*, 9). These objects induce the process of reflection in which the sense of guilt and a regret over missed opportunities hark back to Hardy's 'Your Last Drive':

> I drove not with you... Yet had I sat
> At your side that eve I should not have seen
> That the countenance I was glancing at
> Had a last-time look in the flickering sheen.[15]

Recollection directs the attention of the lyrical subject to himself. In her study in the history of the pastoral elegy, Lambert argues that 'the post-Theocritean pastoral elegist concerns himself with a new drama: that of the mourner's resolution of his grief. What matters most in the pastoral elegy is how we deal with death, not the fate

[15] Thomas Hardy, 'Your Last Drive', in *The Variorum Edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1979), 339-40 (p. 339).

of the dead themselves'.[16] Dunn's book describes the process of coming to terms with death, but, more significantly, is also the story of the loved one, from her illness to her imagined survival in nature and in the objects of the ordinary world. Story telling is another motif in 'Re-reading Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories*', which sums up in miniature the thematic development of *Elegies*, from mourning to 'bliss'. The epigraph from the atheist poet Carducci encapsulates in four lines the same movement, which culminates in the incorruptibility of the human soul by circumventing the Christian dogma of resurrection on the one hand, and by sanctifying the quotidian on the other:

> Salute, o genti umane affaticate!
> Tutto trapassa e nulla può morir.
> Noi troppo odiammo e sofferimmo. Amate.
> Il mondo è bello è santo è l'avvenir.[17]

In Dunn's imagination there seems to exist a clandestine alliance between the female principle and the knowledge of what he describes in an interview as 'the secret life' of things.[18] A mobile given to Lesley by one of her female friends becomes capable of a wonderful transfiguration in 'Sandra's Mobile' and the poet needs to discover the 'woman hidden in me'[19] before he can experience the chain of epiphanies described in the second half of the book. In his mythological perception of the female principle, Dunn continues the same theme we encounter earlier in

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[16] Ellen Zetzel Lambert, *Placing Sorrow: A Study of the Pastoral Elegy Convention from Theocritus to Milton* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 21.
[17] 'Be of good cheer, O weary humans!
Everything passes on and nothing can die.
We have hated and suffered too much. But love!
The world is beautiful and the future is blessed.'
In: Alasdair Macrae, *Douglas Dunn: Selected Poems*, York Notes Series (Harlow: Longman, 1993), 46.
[18] N. Argenti, 'Douglas Dunn' [an interview], *Rumblesoup*, 3 (1987), 21-25 (p. 24).
[19] Dunn, 'Dining' (*E*, 27).

'Celtica', 'Witch-girl' or *Europa's Lover*. I note above the significance of his venture into territories of the human heart conventionally described as 'feminine' in a Scottish literary milieu often seen as masculine. Dunn is aware of the feminine element in his inspiration, and uses it intentionally. He is not ashamed to admit its importance for a male writer:

> For a man to love and live with a woman might even be to acquire some of her femininity at a level deeper than the understanding of it. Men who are not writers might feel conscious of this too, but a writer, perhaps especially a writer of poetry, ought to be particularly sensitive to, and grateful for, a momentary participation in what is alleged conventionally to be the opposite gender.[20]

He subscribes to a kind of esoteric belief which is half-way between pagan and Christian spiritualism. For Dunn, as for Carducci, the transcendental is intrinsic to the secular, and, in the same way as in 'Bliss', the main vehicle for the illustration of what he calls 'the extraordinary dimension of the ordinary'[21] is a bowl of autumnal fruits in *Elegies*.

Partly because of its several allusions, Evelyn Schlag (Dunn's German-language translator and herself the writer of a novel about Mansfield) regards 'Re-reading...' as an 'unsuccessful' poem.[22] But these allusions, especially the ones to Katherine Mansfield's stories, serve as essential explanatory links. As an atheist, Lesley did not believe in the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Her conviction may be illustrated with the following passage from Mansfield's 'Je ne parlais pas français', to which Dunn refers in the second stanza of the poem:

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[20] Douglas Dunn, 'Thinking About Women', *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 June 1988, p. 612.
[21] Argenti, 'Douglas Dunn', 24.
[22] Evelyn Schlag, 'Secrets: On Translating Douglas Dunn's *Elegies* into German', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 33.1 (1997), 37-45 (p. 37).

> "I don't believe in the human soul. Never have. I believe that people are like portmanteaux – packed with certain things, started going, thrown about, tossed away, dumped down, lost and found, half emptied suddenly, or squeezed fatter than ever, until finally the Ultimate Porter swings them on the Ultimate Train and away they rattle."[23]

'Je ne parlais pas français' is also, of course, the story of a man looking after his sick wife. Despite the fact that he often uses religious terms, religious motivation is never a significant force in Dunn's poetry. In *Elegies* in particular, he cannot accept what Williams describes as 'the traditional Christian explanations of undeserved and unmerited suffering'.[24] As Williams puts it, 'any theodicy, any philosophical justification of such apparent injustice remains ultimately unfathomable to him'.[25] This becomes clear in 'Reading Pascal in the Lowlands', or in the vision of her absorption in the natural environment in 'Reincarnations'. Dunn denies that he is a religious person, and describes the significance of God for the poet in an interview: 'To the Christian, He's the first resort. To the poet, the last'.[26] Does that mean that poetry is the first resort for the poet? I shall return to this problem in the fifth chapter.

Nevertheless, Dunn's disbelief in Providence does not mean insensitivity to spirituality:

> As a writer, the experience made me more spiritual. Someone described me as close to a mystic in some poems. I don't relish that, because I don't think I

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[23] Katherine Mansfield, 'Je ne parlais pas français', in *Collected Stories* (London: Constable, 1945), 60-91 (p. 60).
[24] David Williams, '"They will not leave me, the lives of other people": The Poetry of Douglas Dunn', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 23 (1989), 1-24 (p. 18).
[25] Ibid.
[26] Kenneth Roy, 'Poetic Justice' [an interview with Douglas Dunn], *Scotland on Sunday*, 11 March 1990, pp. 29-30 (p. 30).

> am. But it gave me [a] greater sense of poetry as something almost sacred, something that people share.[27]

Dunn defines spirituality as 'a state of mind engendered by direct experience and feeling that opens up a glimpse into life beyond known reality'.[28] Mansfield's 'A Dill Pickle', which gets mentioned in the third stanza of 'Re-reading...', contains the following relevant sentence: '"I felt that you were more lonely than anybody else in the world," he went on, "and yet, perhaps, that you were the only person in the world who was really, truly alive"'.[29] By way of such references, Dunn's appreciation of his first wife takes a modestly indirect route and textual space helps him avoid the appearance of either selfishness or begging for sympathy. Osborne suggests that *Elegies* is at least as much the representation of her 'female virtue' as his loss.[30] Similarly, Constantine argues that celebration is a natural part of elegy writing, since 'Grief is the continuation of love, in absence'.[31] We might add that *Elegies* is also the celebration of the finest moments they spent together in England, France and Scotland: 'Good minutes make good days. Good days make years', Dunn writes in 'At Cruggleton Castle' (*E*, 31). A similar belief in the value of the moment discloses itself in Hardy's 'At Castle Boterel', to which Dunn's poem alludes:

> It filled but a minute. But was there ever
> A time of such quality, since or before,
> In that hill's story? To one mind never.[32]

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[27] Ibid., 29.
[28] O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil', 28.
[29] Katherine Mansfield, 'A Dill Pickle', in *Collected Stories* (London: Constable, 1945), 167-74 (p. 173).
[30] Osborne, 'The Hull Poets', 194.
[31] David Constantine, 'Bereavement' [a review of *E*], *Argos*, 7.2 (1986), 36-38 (p. 36).
[32] Thomas Hardy, 'At Castle Boterel', in *The Variorum Edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1979), 351-52 (p. 352).

Next to 'Re-reading...', 'The Butterfly House' also forms a part of the exposition, since the chronology of events does not start to unfold before the third poem, 'Second Opinion'. In 'The Butterfly House' Dunn introduces further motifs, such as the fruits of the autumn, the images of home and familiarity, and the four colours we can trace throughout the book: blue, green, red and yellow. If the concept of story telling connects 'Re-reading...' with 'The Stories' near the end of the collection, then the images of the Dunns' home in 'The Butterfly House' can be linked with 'Home Again' later in the book – 'Autumnal aromatics, forgotten fruits/ In the bowl of this late November night,/ Chastise me as I put my suitcase down' (*E*, 51) – and with 'Leaving Dundee' at the end:

> And I am going home on Saturday
> To my house, to sit at my desk of rhymes
> Among familiar things of love, that love me.
> (*E*, 64)

Contrary to what one might expect after *Barbarians* and *St Kilda's Parliament*, 'home' is not Scotland for Dunn in *Elegies*. He had been living in Hull with his first wife since 1966 before he accepted a temporary appointment at Dundee University as a writer-in-residence in March 1981. Chronologically, in 'Leaving Dundee' the book ends on a note that is its own inception, on his return to Hull in July 1982 in order to write or finish the poems later collected in *Elegies*. The starting point in 'The Butterfly House', which refers to the Dunns' Newland Park house in Hull, is the sense of familiarity as represented in a detailed enumeration of things and pieces of furniture, from the garage door 'with its familiar groan' to 'Wallpaper, books and prints' (*E*, 10). But each of those things relates a story of defamiliarisation: the objects themselves, or the raw materials they are made of, and even the fruits in the bowl are removed from their original environment: they are brought from Spain and

Morocco, or stolen from the earth and the forests. While in 'The Butterfly House' his sense of familiarity is contrasted with the displacement of organic and inorganic material, in 'Home Again', in a reversed position, the returning poet-persona is confronted, the moment he enters, with a bowl of rotten fruits, which he had forgotten to throw out:

> Cadaver orchard, an orphanage of pips,
> Four apples sink into a pulpy rust,
> And *Eat me, eat me,* says a withered pear,
> *Pay for your negligence and disrespect.*
> (*E*, 51)

In comparison with the vegetative tranquillity and coolness of the house, 'with my breath visible', it is now the lyrical subject who intrudes on an apparently organic environment that has had an independent existence during his six-week absence: 'I taste my house. Each day of its hungry gnosis,/ It led a life of its own, empty of me' (*E*, 51).

Beside the dialectic of alienation and familiarity, another important motif introduced in 'The Butterfly House' is colouring. Apart from the whiteness of snow, Dunn applies four colours (blue, green, red and yellow), which, moreover, normally occur in the same order, for example in 'At Cruggleton Castle' and 'Snow Days'. The stained-glass butterfly of the window is also composed of the same four colours: 'Blue, green, red and yellow it is, surreal/ It is also. I call this The Butterfly House' (*E*, 11). The butterfly becomes the emblem of a metaphysical yearning to become a part of organic existence. As things in and around the house wish to return to their original places, the lyrical subject also wants to be absorbed in nature, which can be read in Freudian terms as a death-wish:

> And that is why I feel at home, but feel
> That the large percentage of me that is water
> Is conspiring to return to the sea,
> Or to the river, flowing in its own shapes,
> It, too, alive in the long room of its being.
> (*E*, 11)

We need to remember at this point that in Dunn's poetry the motif of the river is often identified with the notion of suicide. A similar psychological motivation can be traced in Peter Porter's elegies for his wife, who died in 1974.[33] An allusion to suicide occurs in the title poem of Porter's collection *The Cost of Seriousness*: 'thinking of suicide/ because life or art won't work'[34]. The tender formalism of that poem, and its sense of joyous love, may have mattered to Dunn's *Elegies*. However, at this point the indirectly represented death-wish in 'The Butterfly House' is motivated by the futility of finding consolation, as is apparent in the second half of the book. 'The Stories' records the poet's wish to be able to die some day, as Lesley did, in an exemplary way, morally speaking:

> for I would rather that I could die
> In the act of giving, and prove the truth of us
> Particular, eternal, by doing so
> Be moral at the moment of good death, showing
> An intimate salvation beyond the wish
> Merely to die, but to be, for once, commendable.
> (*E*, 58)

[33] For Dunn's comment on the circumstances of Porter's elegies, see: Douglas Dunn, 'Four letters to Michael Schmidt', in *Letters to an Editor*, ed. by Mark Fisher (Manchester: Carcanet, 1989), 16-19; 49; 83 (p. 49).
[34] Peter Porter, 'The Cost of Seriousness', in *The Cost of Seriousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 30-31 (p. 30).

Hamilton suggests that the 'syntax of this conclusion strains under the difficulties of making room for that "commendable"', and, he adds, 'its strange morality is squeezed out under the pressure of poetic doubt'.[35]

The concept of 'good death' connects Dunn's poetry with a European tradition of moral philosophy that in literature culminated in the work of Leo Tolstoy. Lesley is not only represented as having led an exemplary life but she also died in an exemplary way, in moral terms. Dunn writes in 'Writing with Light': 'Best friend and love, my true contemporary,/ She taught me how to live, then how to die' (*E*, 23). In his biography of Philip Larkin, Andrew Motion remarks on Larkin's visit to Lesley. Motion cites Larkin as saying in a letter to Judy Esperton, dated 15 February 1981, that the 'visit, dreaded in advance and harrowing in retrospect, was quite cheerful in fact, owing to Lesley's incredible composure and courage'.[36] Motion also notes that after Lesley's death, in a letter to Dunn dated 19 March 1981, Larkin repeated the same phrase ('composure and courage'), 'remembering, perhaps, how he had said in 'Aubade' that "courage" in the face of death "means not scaring others"'.[37] In Dunn's own words, 'her patient and beautiful example helped me to realise that I was waging war against life as much as death, and that, as a poet, life was the side I was supposed to be on'.[38] Beside involving questions about the poet's moral and social responsibilities, 'being on the side of life' also has a more intimate, spiritual dimension. In Tolstoy's view good death is the ultimate virtue, as it is our last and most important gesture to those whom we leave behind. It may save the survivors from the existential fear that Pascal describes in Fragment 434 of his

[35] Paul Hamilton, 'Writing with Light – *Elegies*', in *Reading Douglas Dunn*, ed. by Robert Crawford and David Kinloch, Modern Scottish Writers Series (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 94-107 (p. 98).
[36] Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin – A Writer's Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 486.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Dunn, 'Regained: The Light Behind Grief's Dark Veil', 9.

*Pensées*: 'Imagine a number of men in chains, all under sentence of death, some of whom are each day butchered in the sight of the others; those remaining see their own condition in that of their fellows, and looking at each other with grief and despair await their turn'.[39] Natalya Savishna, the protagonist of Tolstoy's 1852 novella *Childhood*, provides the best possible consolation for her family: 'She accomplished the best and greatest thing in life – she died without regret or fear'.[40]

The poems from 'Second Opinion' to 'Creatures' are set in Hull and rural France, except 'Second Opinion', which is set in Leeds, and Scotland only provides the location of 'At Cruggleton Castle' in this section of *Elegies*. The basic motivation behind these poems is the lyrical defiance of oblivion through the recollection of past events, which, in general terms, is one of Dunn's lifelong concerns. The movements in this section include the story of his wife's last days and her death as well as his remembering the times and places of their shared happiness. In 'The Sundial' the image of a book she left on a crumbling sundial symbolises the dichotomy of forgetting and the potential of art to resist time. The same image appears earlier, in the fragile lyric 'Love Poem', in a comparable context:

> I live in you, you live in me;
> We are two gardens haunted by each other.
> Sometimes I cannot find you there,
> There is only the swing creaking, that you have just left,
> Or your favourite book beside the sundial.
> (*TS*, 48)

Although there is very little detachment from the actual experience, Dunn makes continuous attempts to enforce a relatively objective voice on himself. But

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[39] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. by A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1966), 165.
[40] Leo Tolstoy, 'Childhood', in *Childhood, Boyhood and Youth*, trans. by Louise and Aylmer Maude, The World's Classics Series, 352 (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 1-125 (p. 124).

sometimes when his tone seems to slip out of control the nakedness of feeling reminds the reader of Hardy's voice in 'Poems of 1912-13'. '"Why *there*? She's an artist!"', he exclaims in 'Second Opinion' when the melanoma in the eye is diagnosed (*E*, 12). Osborne suggests that the 'unexpectedness of these outbursts lends an hallucinatory intensity to lines that in another context might seem trite'.[41] There is no sign of counterfeit emotion. Morrison says that these poems are 'shaped and measured but have no rhetorical design on us; the poet watches his quatrains and rhyme-schemes, not his readers' tearducts'.[42] Dunn often presents us images of romantic intimacy, as in the last third stanza in 'Thirteen Steps and the Thirteenth of March', which also celebrates the surmise of the spiritual's momentary presence in the ordinary:

> Sad? Yes. But it was beautiful also.
> There was stillness in the world. Time was out
> Walking his dog by the low walls and privet.
> There was anonymity in words and music.
> (*E*, 14)

The exposure of the self in *Elegies* is seen by some as a liberating force also in terms of gender relations, and not by necessity merely in a Scottish context. As Osborne suggests:

> In a culture where masculinity is still equated with not expressing emotion, this is peculiarly liberating for the male reader. Like his Newcastle friend Tony Harrison, Dunn knows that if crying makes one less than a man, not crying makes one less than a human.[43]

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[41] Osborne, 'The Hull Poets', 7.
[42] Morrison, 'Narratives of Grief', 377.
[43] Osborne, 'The Hull Poets', 7.

More than simply being emotional, feeling is implicated in Dunn's *ars poetica*, as it is closely related to lyric poetry. As elsewhere in Dunn, in *Elegies* lyricism means the poet's openness to the innermost guidance of feeling and invention without being diverted by external (socio-cultural or political) influences. In poetic terms, he regards the influence of Modernism, the influence of Eliot in particular, as the main impediment to lyricism in contemporary poetry. 'Yet', he says,

> in the poetry that we all know and love [...] the poet's first person singular is right up there, naked and quivering. The self is on the line. *Elegies* is the kind of area which is a taboo, or whatever you like to call it; but to be any kind of a writer, perhaps particularly a poet, you have to break what I've called a reticence barrier, and you've to touch your own candour. *Elegies* was a subject I simply had to address myself to. It was very simply a question of surrendering to the words that the experience gave me.[44]

*Elegies* may be seen as a special case, since there was more at stake than merely Dunn's own reputation or cultural political assessment: 'If I had denied that experience [and] its life in my own work, then I would have compounded a death with another death'.[45] Some critics still see a danger in the disclosure of feeling, also involving indecent questions such as whether the literary prize went to *Elegies* from appreciation only or also from sympathy. For some the problem may also tie with a sense of the rhetorical in the writing. In Lyon's opinion, the reader 'might feel that [Dunn's] poems are moving and personal, too moving and too personal for them to be good art'.[46]

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[44] Nicholson, 'Dimensions of the Sentient', 198-99.
[45] Ibid., 199.
[46] Lyon, 'The Art of Grief', 52.

In 'Thirteen Steps and the Thirteenth of March', if there is a weakness at all, then, I suggest, it is structural rather than pertaining to the lyrical voice. An apparent numerology, exhibited in the poem's title, structure (it consists of thirteen stanzas) and placing (it begins on page thirteen in the book), reinforces the sense of poetry as an artifice. However, despite his overdone emphasis on textual awareness, Dunn successfully creates a spiritual atmosphere by transforming the thirteen steps from the kitchen to her bedroom into a secular version of the fourteen stations of the Cross, which lead to the place of suffering, to her private Golgotha, just as in the poem each stanza represents a station leading to the account of her funeral in the conclusion. The reader gets a similar impression in Porter's 'An Exequy', which actually deploys the word 'station' in relation to the stairs:

> I'll climb up to that attic where
> The curtain of your life was drawn
> Some time between despair and dawn –
> I'll never know with what halt steps
> You mounted to this plain eclipse
> But each stair now will station me
> A black responsibility.[47]

'Arrangements' also comments on the secularisation of the foundations of the Christian creed in the bitterly ironic image of the registrar as a 'recording angel in a green pullover' (*E*, 16). In a different context, in 'Arrangements' Dunn reworks the irreverent treatment of eschatology of 'A Dream of Judgement': 'He writes things down. He does not ask,/ "Was she good?"' (*E*, 16). At the same time, Dunn's indignation and the bleakly indifferent environment link up with 'Reading Pascal in

[47] Peter Porter, 'An Exequy', in *The Cost of Seriousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 17-20 (p. 18).

the Lowlands', which defines suffering as a universal but transcendentally unsupportable condition of existence.

In some pieces of the loosely interpolated sequence of Italian sonnets ('A Silver Air Force', 'France', 'The Kaleidoscope', 'Sandra's Mobile', 'Attics', 'Tursac' and 'Château d'If') Dunn introduces the motif of aeroplane and seagull shaped mobiles. Bernard O'Donoghue describes the latter as 'a perfect post-death image for the threadlike fragility of the familiar'.[48] But Dunn goes beyond the familiar and the ordinary. His imagination feeds on ancient Greek mythology when he recognises the mobiles as the symbol of human life: their fine threads are only waiting to be cut. When his wife dies the seagull mobiles also become capable of an Ovidian metamorphosis in the closing lines of 'Sandra's Mobile':

> She did not wake again. To prove our love
> Each gull, each gull, each gull, turned into dove.
> (*E*, 21)

Hamilton attributes to those mobiles various aesthetic functions, which point in the direction of 'a higher realism': the small fighter planes in 'A Silver Air Force' illustrate the poet's own fight with terror and 'the fearful, deathly expansions' of Pascal's world, whereas the mobiles in Dunn's book may also signify an anxiety of confinement, that after her death life will become 'a diminished, unreal simulacrum'; and finally the transfiguration of the seagulls into doves represent the transfiguration of her soul on a different level of realism.[49]

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[48] Bernard O'Donoghue, 'Pain in the Balance' [a review of *E*], *Poetry Review*, 75.1 (1985), 49-50 (p. 50).
[49] Hamilton, 'Writing with Light – *Elegies*', 103-104.

In an attempt to draw strength from her spiritual testament, in the middle section of the book Dunn looks back in time to evoke the days spent together in Hull ('Creatures'), France ('Tursac', 'Château d'If'), and Scotland ('At Cruggleton Castle'). These remembering poems involve both photographically sharp recordings (in 'At Cruggleton Castle') and the gradual fading of memories, for example in 'Château d'If': 'I can't remember, but I can't forget/ Our outing' (*E*, 32). Critics have noticed that Dunn displays a strong sense of the place in *Elegies*.[50] His receptivity to place is truly paralleled in Hardy's treatment of the Wessex landscape. But the natural environment has different functions in Dunn's and Hardy's elegies. Hardy stayed in Wessex after the death of his wife, and therefore everything in the familiar surroundings reminded him of her absence, whereas in Dunn there is a greater variety of locations, including invented places, which are suffused with her spiritual presence. This is especially so in the second half of the book, for instance in 'Pretended Homes' and 'Snow Days'. But in the first half the way Dunn associates feelings and experiences with different settings is closer to Tennyson's *In Memoriam* than to Hardy's 'Poems of 1912-13'. Ebbatson points out that Tennyson 'associates his dead friend with specific times and places: the bleak confrontation with the London house, the visit to Cambridge with its "reverend walls" [...], and the aversion to Vienna, full of "treble darkness" [...], are all carefully woven into the texture of the memories the poem conjures up from time to time'.[51] Like Tennyson, Dunn not only appends different moods to different places and settings, but places are also endowed with the capacity to evoke these moods. France is identified with regret and missed opportunities in 'France' and 'Empty Wardrobes'; Scottish landscapes with

[50] See, for example: Lyon, 'The Art of Grief', 49.
[51] Roger Ebbatson, *Tennyson* (London: Penguin, 1988), 78.

contemplation in 'Reading Pascal in the Lowlands' and 'Transblucency'; and the Newland Park house relates to familiarity in 'The Butterfly House', and to grief in 'Birch Room'. As noted above, Dunn has been criticised for his elegiac treatment of Scotland, which may generate an inhibiting perception of the country's present and future in cultural terms. An elegiac tone characterises most of the poems that are related to public matters from as early as the 'Terry Street' sequence, and Scotland as a subject of elegy solidly defines the position of Scottish poems like 'St Kilda's Parliament: 1879-1979', 'An Address on the Destitution of Scotland', 'Witch-girl', 'Galloway Motor Farm' and 'Monumental Sculptor'. The theme continues in *Northlight*, where Dunn even goes back to Pictish times. His wide and eclectic reading coupled with a strong sense of history leads to a backward-looking and cataloguing type of poetry.

Although at times Dunn's landscapes in *Elegies* are characterised by an almost photographic sharpness, and photography is a central metaphor in the book, here visual imagination is probably more closely related to painting than to photography. In 'At Cruggleton Castle' he describes a natural scenery as a 'Gallovidian palette', and nightfall on the sea as 'pure, pictorial, painterly' (*E*, 31). He has a special gift to paint northern bays and estuaries, and, more often than not, he presents these cold scenes as static, calm settings. In his treatment of the environment he fuses the supposedly Gaelic, dreamy and nostalgic sensibility with an Ovidian, animated and pagan taste. As in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for Dunn everything in nature has a story to tell. Lambert describes the typical perception of nature in the elegy convention in terms of Ruskin's concept 'the Pathetic Fallacy', that is a 'transferral of human feelings onto the nonhuman world'.[52] Dunn himself

[52] Lambert, *Placing Sorrow*, xxvi.

identifies this Ruskinian notion in Mahon's 'The Apotheosis of Tins'.[53] A similar mode of anthropomorphic representation involves the personification of inanimate things in Dunn's poem 'December':

> The town is part of my mourning
> And I, too, am part of whatever it grieves for.
> Whose tears are these, pooled on this cellophane?
> (*E*, 53)

Dunn's delight in colours and light effects can be aligned not merely with his interest in the visual arts, but also with his poetics. He first put forward his perception of lyricism in Scottish literature in his provocative essay 'The Predicament of Scottish Poetry', written at the time of the writing of *Elegies*. The essay starts off with his account of an old Scottish film clip:

> A piece of 1940s' film I looked at recently in the Scottish Film Archive showed a woman in a hothouse, somewhere in the market gardens of the Clyde Valley near Lanark. It was a sunny day and she wore a white blouse with short sleeves. She raised her arms into a pool of sunlight and the lens, like the eye, could not focus on it. Her arm disappeared into the white among the fruits that were unseen, unphotographed, but there. As an image, it might have been contrived a little by the limitation of the camera or its operator. It was forty years old. But whether second-hand or contrived or an image from yesterday, it had a glow, a quality of light to it. Etymologically, photography means "writing with light", and I am beguiled by that. (*PSP*, 273)

He goes on to argue that this quality is missing from Scottish verse: 'After playing back many times that little story without narrative, I realized how rarely such images appear in Scottish poetry, roundly evoked, described warmly but without purpose other than the design of delight or a surrender to imagination in the knowledge that

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[53] Douglas Dunn, 'Everything is susceptible' [a review of *Poems 1962-1978* by Derek Mahon; *The Echo Gate* by Michael Longley; and *Poets from the North of Ireland*, ed. by Frank Ormsby], *London Review of Books*, 20 March 1980, 9-10 (p. 9).

by doing so a poet discovers and gives' (*PSP*, 273). Dunn uses this early cinematic experiment to endorse a poetry of inspiration as opposed to a kind of poetry that is responsive to external, non-literary compulsions. He condemns the cultural environment in which 'Sensuously imaginative phrase-making is not what is expected of a Scottish poet' (*PSP*, 273). His treatment of the visual, then, also should be seen in the context of a counter-reaction to the general temperament of Scottish literature which, supposedly, discourages lyrical poetry. He professes a conventional poetics when he maintains that art should also be a source of pleasure, and a similar conviction presents itself in the poems in which he remembers Lesley's vitality and invention as a visual artist. The motif of light appears rather unexpectedly in the near centre of a longer poem called 'Dining', in a description of Lesley's gift 'to compose the world in light' (*E*, 27). The word 'light' rhymes with 'delight' in the second next, and with 'alight' in the penultimate line. Dunn devotes a whole poem to the same motif. In 'Writing with Light', whose title refers to the etymological equivalent of the word 'photography', he describes her love of visual things in five quintets with a playful rhyme scheme. The poem starts with a sportive and yet inspired situation, where he alludes to MacDiarmid's line 'Hold a glass of pure water to the eye of the sun!'.[54] Lesley fills a jar with water to experiment with the interplay of light and water:

> she'd fill a jar
> Then hold it to the sun. The art of day
> Leapt on the shapely glass, the unfamiliar
> Blues, changes, clouds, a watery display
> That calmed and caught clear heavens in a jar.
> (*E*, 23)

[54] Hugh MacDiarmid (C. M. Grieve), 'The Glass of Pure Water', in *Complete Poems*, ed. by Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken, 2 vols. (Manchester: Carcanet, 1993-94), I, 1041-43 (p. 1041).

But if Dunn's visual imagination can be regarded in the context of poetic technique and literary convention, his use of the light motif also has a significant spiritual dimension. As in the 1940s' film clip, where the woman's raised arm vanishes in a white pool of brilliance, so in 'Writing with Light' Lesley's 'experimental fun' also involves an upward movement, which is conventionally associated with an attempt to establish a contact with metaphysical powers: 'That contemplated water formed a trap/ To catch the sky with' (*E*, 23). The motif of light is used in a similar context in Henry Vaughan's 'Ascension-Hymn':

> They are all gone into the world of light
> And alone I sit lingring here;
> Their very memory is fair and bright,
> And my sad thoughts doth clear.[55]

As with the mobiles, the light motif also endorses Dunn's ambition to approach supernatural secrets, and helps us notice a reality that is 'unseen but there', by making the familiar unfamiliar. He is careful enough to leave open the transcendental dimension inherent in art, and represents Lesley's art of 'Reconjuring a world in black and white' (*E*, 23) as both rational and surreal. Her photographs are black and white, but in Dunn's imagination light easily associates itself with colouring. In the second half of the book he unites the two motifs (lights and colours) in the images of coloured lights in the lamps of Avalon in 'Snow Days'. These red, green, blue and yellow lights create a dream-world, the territory of fantasy. Moreover, we have to keep in mind the Christian associations of candlelight as the symbol of the soul,

[55] Henry Vaughan, 'Ascension-Hymn', in *Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. by L. C. Martin (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 316-21 (p. 318).

though this image need not signify specifically Christian mysteries in 'Thirteen Steps and the Thirteenth of March':

> At night, I lay beside her in the unique hours.
> There were mysteries in candle-shadows,
> Birds, aeroplanes, the rabbits of our fingers,
> The lovely, erotic flame of the candlelight.
> (*E*, 14)

If her spirit is ever present in the ordinary world that surrounds us – 'She rustles in my study's palm;/ She is the flower on the geranium'[56] –, in 'Snow Days' Dunn also secures a place for her in a half-fantastic natural environment where 'apples in the terraced orchards are/ Already drawing juice from the wet wood' (*E*, 54).

The thematic course of *Elegies* takes a different turn after the poem 'Creatures': while Lesley's personality and the poet's relation to her memory are in the focus of the book's first half, from 'Pretended Homes' on, the poems mainly reflect upon the husband's feelings. These poems narrate grief and its transformation, 'examined in a mystical, universal way'.[57] Obviously, Dunn goes beyond the primary experience of loss and there is an implicit debate going on about the relation between art and life in 'Anniversaries':

> I shiver in the memory
> And sculpt my foolish poetry
> From thwarted life and snapped increase.
> Cancer's no metaphor.
> (*E*, 62)

[56] Dunn, 'Reincarnations' (*E*, 44).
[57] O'Donoghue, 'Pain in the Balance', 50.

The same sense of the uselessness of art emerges in Porter's above quoted 'An Exequy' ('The abstract hell of memory,/ The pointlessness of poetry'),[58] and also in 'The Lying Art', where Porter says: 'Our world/ of afterwards will have no need of lies'.[59] It is common between the two husband-poets, Porter and Dunn, that they see art as dishonest and mendacious, because, though it is a powerful means to preserve the memory of the dead, it certainly cannot bring them back. In 'The Lying Art' Porter discerns an unbridgeable gap between art and reality: 'And what has this to do with poetry? Inroads/ into rhetoric'.[60] Lesley had a different opinion when she advised what Dunn records in the opening lines of 'December':

> "No, don't stop writing your grievous poetry.
> It will do you good, this work of your grief.
> Keep writing until there is nothing left.
> It will take time, and the years will go by."
> (*E*, 53)

This is consonant with the way Dunn described the role of writing in getting over the grievous experience. Clearly, in this case the personal uses of poetry also included a therapeutic function. Dunn said, 'The book is about living through a death and its aftermath, and having done that, I can live my life and do my work'.[61] If formalism helped express grief in poetry, then poetry itself helped him to bear grief in his life.

Dunn contemplates the relationship between fiction and reality in 'The Stories'. There are various ways of life in which, in his words, 'grief is the hero' (*E*, 57): the lives of soldiers, explorers, missionaries, exiles. What distinguishes their stories from the poet's own is that in those narratives there is 'always somewhere to

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[58] Porter, 'An Exequy', 18.
[59] Peter Porter, 'The Lying Art', in *The Cost of Seriousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 11-12 (p. 12).
[60] Ibid., 11.
[61] O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil', 33.

go to'. But he can see no escape from his grief, as he suggests in a phrase that echoes Larkin's famous line 'Nothing, like something, happens anywhere'[62]: 'Interior ethics, like oncogenic catastrophes,/ Happen anywhere' (*E*, 57). Dunn regrets he is deprived of 'the beautiful gesture,/ The joke of spitting in Death's broad, fictitious grin' (*E*, 57). We may detect a slightly nostalgic view of history when he allocates self-imposed heroism in the domain of fiction. He suggests that it is a kind of behaviour that has no place in our world: 'It is no longer the world of stories' (*E*, 58). He also rejects reticence in poetry:

> Why be discreet? A broken heart is what I have –
> A pin to burst the bubble of shy poetry,
> Mnemosyne revealed as what, in life, she stands for.
> (*E*, 58)

Mnemosyne is the personification of remembrance and the mother of the nine muses in ancient Greek mythology. Lyon rightly claims that 'Dunn is reminding us that memory is an art',[63] but we have to add that actual experience always remains prior to poetry. In 'The Stories', Dunn offers no solution either on an ethical or artistic level. Like Porter, he turns down the possibility of consoling fiction as well as the dignity of sustained efforts in the Camusian sense:

> Our speculative visions of the past
> Narrated through the legendary, retrospective fictions,
> Tales of anachronism. Such days they were!
> Not even that sweet light garnishing Sisyphean innocence
> Redeems me, dedicated to the one
> Pure elegy, looking as if I like the way I am.
> (*E*, 58)

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[62] Philip Larkin, 'I Remember, I Remember', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 81-82 (p. 82).
[63] Lyon, 'The Art of Grief', 53.

However, that poetry is still the last resort for Dunn is clear from the fact that writing was the ultimate affirmation of his belief in the value and durability of his art. He says in Bernard O'Donoghue's contemporary interview: 'Writing *Elegies* affirmed poetry to myself, myself to myself – it seems melodramatic and preposterous, but all I mean is that I have discovered a kind of patience, or tolerance, some sort of understanding that poetry is natural and benevolent, even when it's about what hurts its writers and readers'.[64]

If poetry is not enough to bring her back, then neither does religion offer a solution for Dunn. We find Christian associations in 'Reincarnations' ('my Lady Christ', *E*, 44), 'Dining' ('kitchen pilgrimage', *E*, 27), or in 'The Stories' ('intimate salvation', *E*, 58), but he does not share the Christian belief in redemption and in the progress to salvation and resurrection. What we find instead is a unique blend of quasi-pantheistic and pagan ideas and myths concerning reincarnation and a mystical absorption in nature. Rather than mourning her traceless departure, Dunn expresses his conviction of her metaphysical presence in the ordinary world in 'Reincarnations':

> Our little wooden train runs by itself
> Along the windowsill, each puff-puff-puff
> A breath of secret, sacred stuff.
> I feel her goodness breathe, my Lady Christ.
> Her treasured stories mourn her on their shelf,
> In spirit-air, that watchful poltergeist.
> (*E*, 44)

[64] O'Donoghue, 'An Interview with Douglas Dunn', 48.

Dunn also finds philosophy unhelpful in respect of offering consolation, as he suggests in 'Reading Pascal in the Lowlands'. His reflection on the indifference of the environment is mediated through confronting collective pain with private grief. Although striving to sympathise, he is unable to articulate his compassion for the father of a boy with leukaemia:

> He sees my book, and then he looks at me,
> Knowing me for a stranger. I have said
> I am sorry. What more is there to say?
> (*E*, 46)

Here Dunn perhaps echoes W. B. Yeats's 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', which rhymes with, and refers back to, the book's epigraph by Carducci:

> But is there any comfort to be found?
> Man is in love and loves what vanishes,
> What more is there to say?[65]

There is a minimum level of communication between self and other, and grief is a psychological impediment that prevents it, as Dunn says in 'The Stories': 'Who am I/ To weep for Salvador or Kampuchea/ When I am made the acolyte of my own shadow?' (*E*, 56). In some of his earlier books, particularly in *Terry Street*, it was otherness that acted as the primary obstacle in social intercourse. In *Elegies* it cannot be the same that prevents contact, because, as he recognises in 'Reading Pascal in the Lowlands' and elsewhere, pain is universal. We all share grief: those who have not experienced it yet, at one time or other will, he suggests in 'The Stories'. Death may

[65] W. B. Yeats, 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', in *The Variorum Edition of the Poems by W. B. Yeats*, ed. by Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (London: Macmillan, 1973), 428-33 (pp. 429-30).

even be present at every new beginning: 'Death, too, must have looked in on our wedding'.[66]

In the poems of the second half of *Elegies* the activity of the lyrical subject is mostly confined to observation and reflection. As O'Donoghue argues, 'the mysticism of solitude runs through most of the poems in the later part of the book'.[67] But that 'mysticism of solitude' also means the solitude of mysticism: it is a melancholic mood by which Dunn draws a clear line between the self and the environment. Indignation and self-alienation define the tone in the greater part of *Elegies*, and if Dunn had been prone to play the role of the outsider earlier in his poetic career, then the mystery of grief was all the more likely to turn him into a recluse during this period of his life. The notion of reading Pascal intensifies the solitary and estranged spirit of these poems. Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth-century mystical thinker, was, to a certain extent, a sceptic. He was concerned with anxiety about the transcendental dimension of human existence. He thought mankind was left alone in an impersonal universe, which he described in one of his widely known fragments: 'The eternal silence of these infinite spaces fills me with dread'.[68] It is apparently a contradiction that Pascal was also a devout Catholic. But he was convinced that only religion had the potential to resolve the paradoxical nature of human experience, residing half-way between the infinitely small and the infinitely vast. Reading Pascal's *Pensées* was unlikely to convert Dunn to Catholicism: what he borrowed from the French philosopher was mainly a disbelief in the penetrability of existence, but did not come to share Pascal's belief in God. Dunn can find no

[66] Dunn, 'Arrangements' (*E*, 15).
[67] O'Donoghue, 'Pain in the Balance', 50.
[68] Pascal, *Pensées*, 95.

answer to the reasons for pain and suffering, as he suggests in 'Reading Pascal in the Lowlands': 'Nature is silent on that question' (*E*, 45).

The poem is a reflection on the condition of the self in relation to the natural and social environment. At this stage Dunn ascribes the tragedy of solitary anguish to an elusive and inhumane nature, like Pascal in Fragment 229 of *Pensées*:

> I look around in every direction and all I see is darkness. Nature has nothing to offer me that does not give rise to doubt and anxiety. If I saw no sign there of a Divinity I should decide on a negative solution: if I saw signs of a Creator everywhere I should peacefully settle down in the faith. But, seeing too much to deny and not enough to affirm, I am in a pitiful state.[69]

The indifference of nature is suggested by the images of birch trees in 'A Summer Night' and 'Birch Room'; the abundant but cold fruits in 'The Butterfly House' and 'Home Again'; and also by the birdsong in 'Larksong', which presents a nostalgic juxtaposition of reawakening nature and the renewal of grief: 'it notates my sorrow/ In Holderness, where summer frost/ Melts from the green like her departing ghost' (*E*, 39). Although the birches in the garden named after the husband and the wife may also evoke the Ovidian story of the happy love and twin deaths of Philemon and Baucis, in 'A Summer Night' they conjure up an air of insensibility which is present in the natural environment:

> My birch trees have their own two lives to lead
> Without our love, although we named them us.
> They play inside the aromatic wind
> That is their house for ever.
> (*E*, 42)

[69] Ibid., 162.

In some poems Dunn rejects nature as a possible source for consolation but there are also exceptions. At times he refers to the natural environment as a metaphysical being that may reveal its secrets. While in the 'Terry Street' sequence it is a social milieu separated from the self by communicative barriers that hides mysteries, in the second half of *Elegies* he turns to an animated nature only to encounter secrets again. There are cases though, when there is a chance for the empathetic soul to access those spiritual secrets, as in 'Land Love':

> What rustles in the leaves, if it is not
> What I asked for, an opening of doors
> To a half-heard religious anecdote?
> (*E*, 47)

The same sense of nature being a passageway to the transcendental is observable in 'Listening'. The poem can be divided according to the two main components of the Petrarchan sonnet. The first nine lines correspond to the *octave*, which usually presents a narrative or a situation (here the events taking place around him remind the poet of his own grief, sorrow and love), whereas the last six lines duplicate the *sestet*, which explains or supplements the preceding situation with general comments. In the first structural unit of the poem diverse impressions of sound (a squeak from an unoiled bicycle and laughter), as well as silence, set in motion an associative process that allusively represents the course of mourning. The squeak recalls suffering and grief in the first sentence, and in the second the noiseless falling of the rose-petals directs the movement of emotion to sorrow. In the following sentence the indiscretion of the sound of laughter intruding in the orchard (which is a symbol of privacy) is contrasted with the image of the kissing apples, recalling the images of intimate love. The second section, with its surrealist

allusions, supplements and brings the first half of the poem to a conclusion on the note of eavesdropping on the final secrets of love and mortality hidden in nature:

> I felt I almost heard the secrets of a tree –
> The fruits falling, the birds fluttering,
> The music danced to under coloured lights.
> (*E*, 43)

Nature's indifference is juxtaposed with, and balanced by, the images of familiarity in the motifs of home and island, as two possible domains where consolation can be found. If the privacy of the Newland Park house serves as an escape from the outside world by way of returning to memories in 'Home Again' and 'Leaving Dundee', then the island image, referring to an imaginary land, suggests another route of escape from reality. The '*insula sacra*' in part two of the finely polished short sequence 'Snow Days' is Avalon, the sacred island known from Celtic mythology where the souls of the dead reside. The place in Dunn's poem may be inspired by the image of a Scottish island, or by the view of the shore from the distance:

> The lanterns ahead of us are all at sea –
> Green, blue, red and yellow, the lamps of Avalon,
> The fictions of a life that is to come.
> Snow melts on the waters of *insula sacra*
> And lit peaks look like a stone regatta, in Yondertown.
> (*E*, 54)

In the latter part of the book fantasy emerges as the final chance for the possible compensation for the pain of loss, and, obviously, the spectacular, and sometimes dramatic, Scottish landscapes have a greater appeal to Dunn's imagination than the flat Holderness vista south of the border. The images of northern seacapes, 'Where

rock and sea and passionate distances/ Invent an island', inseparably converge with the realm of the visionary in 'Pretended Homes':

> I see her where the shingle sings
> With salt, looking for pretty stones, her skirt
> Held out of water's sea-lazy stroke and surge.
> I am inventing here for one who's dead.
> I am making a place for her. It is
> On no map. It is out of my spirit.
> (*E*, 37)

Dunn is in love with the Scottish landscape but he is against Scotland's stereotypical perceptions, in which the northern glens, lochs and islands conventionally play a definitive part. His so-called emigration to Hull for nearly two decades, and to America and France for a short time, can be seen as an escape not only from Scottish identity but also from the dilemma between being a reluctant visitor and a permanent Scottish resident. In retrospect, there was an imminent danger that he would lose interest in Scotland partly because of the inhibiting formulas and old idiosyncrasies of Scottish culture. In his pre-*Elegies* period probably the most significant expression of his reawakened love of the Scottish landscape is 'Loch Music' in *St Kilda's Parliament*:

> I listen as recorded Bach
> Restates the rhythms of a loch.
> Through blends of dusk and dragonflies
> A music settles on my eyes
> Until I hear the living moors,
> Sunk stones and shadowed conifers,
> And what I hear is what I see,
> A summer night's divinity.
> (*SKP*, 79)

It is indicative of Dunn's perception of the Scottish landscape right at this stage that the surreal and the spiritual irrevocably link up with the real and the physical, which

directly feeds into the use of landscape poetry as a path to establishing the historical identity of Scotland in *Northlight*. If England inspires a kind of poetry that revolves around social criticism and urbanity, and rural France invites sunlit pastoral verse, then for Dunn Scotland is the place for solitary meditation and long walks along the desolate seashore. He is a man of estuaries and his discovery of the Tay and its firth as a source of inspiration probably played a part in his retreat from the Humber Estuary, and also led to his redefinition of the Scottish landscape through promulgating the hidden treasures of the Lowlands, particularly of North-East Fife, against the stereotypical images of the Highlands.

In the second half of *Elegies*, from 'Pretended Homes' on, out of the eighteen poems at least five have Scottish settings. Place-names like the Tay, Newport and Glasgow identify these settings. That the manifestly Scottish poems and those that are set in England appear alternately, reflects Dunn's commuting between Scotland and Hull, 'Eight months of up-and-down'.[70] This alternation is particularly visible in the last five poems, from 'Snow Days' to 'Leaving Dundee'. In 'Reading Pascal in the Lowlands' the place-name of the title, a golf course and a kirkyard arguably identify a rather typical Scottish setting. The closing image reveals an even more specific identity. 'From a panoptic hill' the poet looks down on a 'little town, its estuary, its bridge' (*E*, 46): it may be Newport-on-Tay or elsewhere (though the estuary he describes is probably the Firth of Tay), but it does not really matter. What matters is that, even though he says goodbye to Scotland at the end, in *Elegies* Dunn retains the small-town Scottish identity he established in *St Kilda's Parliament* and *Secret Villages*.

[70] Dunn, 'Leaving Dundee' (*E*, 64).

In 'Transblucency' we probably encounter the same setting as in 'Reading Pascal in the Lowlands', on this occasion night-time:

> The lights of Newport rinse in the tide,
> Then one by one disperse, as life dissolves
> Into the deity within ourselves.
> (*E*, 49)

It is autumn 'by the Tay when the geese are flying' (*E*, 49), just as in the closing poem, in 'Leaving Dundee'. Correspondingly to Dunn's own mood, the river is described as 'rain-misted' and 'subtle' in 'Leaving Dundee' (*E*, 64). These are the moments when he falls in love with the Firth of Tay. In the ensuing *Northlight*, a lyrical kaleidoscope of Fife and Tayside, he revisits the 'mystic Firth'[71] and its bridge in several poems. Dunn has become a local resident by then, but in *Elegies* the place seems to have secured a lasting bond with his imagination. 'Snow Days' is one of Dunn's most wonderfully elevated poem sequences. 'Not Scotland',[72] we might say with him: it could be anywhere, as 'Snow is its own country' (*E*, 55). It is nowhere land, though the different settings, a winter seascape, a white birchwood and 'White penitential gardens of snow' (*E*, 55), were probably inspired by Scottish panoramas. Eventually, he identifies Scotland in the last piece of the sequence:

> O Aphrodite Scotia, the white rain
> Squanders its wet on us, and we shall cross
> Seas of upholstered ice and not complain.
> (*E*, 55)

[71] Dunn, '75°' (*N*, 19).
[72] Dunn, 'A House in Scotland' (*N*, 38).

In 'Snow Days' Dunn does not need the kind of objective correlative to discover the feminine principle of his native land that Heaney's bog girl in 'Punishment' or his own witch girl represent. Like Europa, the ghost of our continent, Scotland's anima reveals herself in a dream.

Apart from being a visionary world, in 'Snow Days' the surreal natural environment also reflects the landscape of the soul. In western culture snow is conventionally associated with death as well as purity. Dunn uses it in the former sense in the first poem, but in the rest of this short sequence snow first of all epitomises tranquillity and solitude. In his imagination the wintry land is appropriate to the lyrical sensibility, because it reflects a solitary state when the poet abandons himself to meditation. Snow is also a frequent presence in the poetry of Derek Mahon. Dunn's Irish poet-friend associates stillness and a quiet lyrical mood with it in 'Two Songs', 'The Snow Party', 'Light Music' and 'Antarctica'. Its use is not without precedents in Dunn's own verse. We find two winter landscapes in *Love or Nothing* and in both cases he contrasts the whiteness of snow with filth and corruption. In 'Winter Orchard' he speaks of the dripping icicles as 'soot-spotted stalactites' (*LN*, 14), and, similarly, in 'White Fields', a reminiscence from childhood, he describes a land covered with 'smoke-darkened snow' (*LN*, 33). The context of Dunn's use of the snow motif in Part IX of *Europa's Lover* comes closer to the way he applies it in *Elegies*. The last stanza of that poem is a melancholic record of a tragic disenchantment with society:

> Then there was Strindberg or some such,
> Up to his waist in lake and shivering,
> Demented with ethics, maddened
> By men and women and the snow falling.
> (*SP*, 221)

The same motif re-emerges in Dunn's subsequent *Northlight*, in the poem 'A Snow-walk': 'What's haunting what, the birchwood or the snow?' (*N*, 42). The birch appears to be Dunn's favourite tree, and its combination with snow in images of wintry birchwoods is particularly atmospheric both in 'A Snow-walk' and in Part II of 'Snow Days':

> White, legendary white
> In a birkenshaw,
> Moonlight and silver birch
> And the song of a snow-bunting...
> (*E*, 55)

Dunn's woodland images recall some of the pictures taken by Robert Moyes Adam, the great photographer of the Scottish landscape. His photograph called 'Beechwood, Crichton Castle' may well represent the scene of one of Dunn's solitary walks, whereas his 'Birch Trees in Snow, Pitmain Woods, Kingussie' serves as an exquisite visual illustration of 'Snow Days II'. What Dunn the poet seems to share with Moyes Adam the photographer is that both of them invite their readers or viewers 'not merely to look at [the] landscape but to enter it and travel through it'.[73]

His confrontation with chronology negatively affects Dunn's mood. In spite of the gradual fading of grief, time may bring about the occasional renewal of pain, especially on each anniversary of Lesley's death. It is particularly distressing when the date falls on Mothers' Day, as recorded in 'At the Edge of a Birchwood', and when he witnesses nature reawakening in the spring in 'Larksong'. The four-poem sequence called 'Anniversaries' is organised around the poet's encounter with the

[73] Bruce Pert, 'Robert Moyes Adam', in *Mood of the Moment: Masterworks of Photography from the University of St Andrews* [a catalogue of photographs exhibited by the Department of Art History] (St Andrews: University of St Andrews, 1998) [no page numbers].

recurring days of the year: the day when they first met, their wedding date, an unidentified day in May and her death-date in March. Similarly to what we find in Tennyson's elegy, Dunn's mood sometimes relapses into a former stage of grief, especially when he expects encouragement from his departed wife:

> What shall I do? Instruct me, dear,
> Longanimous encourager,
> Sweet Soul in the athletic rain
> And wife now to the weather.
> (*E*, 59)

The theme of 'Anniversaries' continues in the ensuing 'Hush' – 'Shh. Sizzle of days, weeks, months, years' (*E*, 63) –, and its blank prospects are reinforced by the poet's recording of a visit to a friend suffering from cancer: 'Behind me I can hear/ A click of fantasy heels,/ But there is no one there' (*E*, 63). The closing part of 'Anniversaries' presents Dunn's above quoted dismissal of poetry as a possible source of consolation. However, with the time passing, the imperative to seek a way out gradually prevails over the apathy recorded in the first poems.

The motifs in *Elegies* can be arranged into two sets: those that call up the sense of familiarity and privacy (such as home and orchard), and the ones that evoke spirituality and fantasy (candlelight, colours, light, mobiles and island). Both groups point in the same direction, as they bring forward consolation through the poet's conviction of his wife's continuing, spiritual existence. An imaginative access to metaphysical reality leads Dunn to the recognition of her incorporeal survival in the familiar world in 'Land Love':

> She waits at the door of the hemisphere
> In her harvest dress, in the remote
> Local August that is everywhere and here.
> (*E*, 47)

But if earlier Dunn saw that memory (and, we should add, love) was art, then now in the last stage of mourning, on the threshold of consolation, the two become exchanged: 'art is love, and beauty is/ Our commonplace sublime', Dunn says in 'Transblucency' (*E*, 49). The two movements in *Elegies*, her imaginary absorption in nature and the poet's returning home in a spiritual sense, are brought into contact in the beautiful closing lines of 'Home Again'. It is the description of a mystical communion of the living and the dead, which, in Bernard O'Donoghue's terms, leads up to the 'angelicisation of their loves',[74] and which is a part of the husband's consolation:

> A spirit shivers in the appled air,
> And I know whose it is. A floral light
> Bleaches my eye with angelophanous
> Secrets. They are more than remembering,
> Larger than sentiment. I call her name,
> And it is very strange and wonderful.
> (*E*, 52)

The closing poem, 'Leaving Dundee', displays a point of view which is opposite to that of the preceding poems, as it presents Dunn's expectations for the future rather than retrospection. With the two introductory poems, it creates a frame around the narrative: while in 'Rereading Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories*' and 'The Butterfly House' Dunn starts recording grief, 'Leaving Dundee' terminates this process on the note of consolation when he decides to accept the challenge of what future days may bring. Several of the poems in *Elegies* follow the kind of convention of meditative poetry in which a natural landscape induces

[74] O'Donoghue, 'Pain in the Balance', 50.

contemplation. In 'Leaving Dundee' the sight of the flying wild geese above the Tay evokes the idea of moving south, back to Hull, after having spent a period of about eight months in Dundee. The image of the birds becomes a symbol, which, once deciphered, conveys an existential imperative to the poet:

> Eight months of up-and-down – goodbye, goodbye –
> Since I sat listening to the wild geese cry
> Fanatic flightpaths up autumnal Tay,
> Instinctive, mad for home – make way! make way!
> Communal feathered scissors, cutting through
> The grievous artifice that was my life,
> I was alert again, and listening to
> That wavering, invisible V-dart
> Between two bridges.
> (*E*, 64)

There is a similarity between Dunn's wording in his description of a moment of epiphany in 'Leaving Dundee' ('listening to/ That wavering, invisible V-dart') and an early poetic attempt recorded in 'A Rediscovery of Juvenilia':

> Here, too, is a line, a lost one, that says,
> "It is like listening to a rainbow…"
> I'll close the book on it and start again.
> (*E*, 50)

In both these cases the image of a rainbow marks an illuminating experience that engenders a new beginning. Fiction and fact are juxtaposed in the fluffy mock-melancholy of an unripe poetic experiment recorded in 'A Rediscovery of Juvenilia' and the robust zeal of the moving geese in 'Leaving Dundee' that invite Dunn to 'close the book' on grief and 'start again'. The Newland Park house where he travels back to write *Elegies* conjures up not only sad memories, but also embodies an essentially positive value: the idea of the recovery of the way home. The poems in the second half of the book prepare the idea of returning to Hull and erase the

negative implications of the 'Butterfly House', and so the reader may appreciate his decision as a genuine, morally and aesthetically acceptable motivation. This epilogue also records the book's own inception, as 'Leaving Dundee' refers to the expiry of Dunn's appointment as a Writer-in-Residence at Dundee University and his return to Hull in July 1982 to write or finish the poems later collected in *Elegies*.

'Leaving Dundee' is Dunn's invitation to his new bride, and so he provides a finale not dissimilar from the conclusion of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, where a closing wedding song is supposed to break with the solemn mood of the poem. He met Lesley Bathgate in Dundee in April 1982 and they married three years later, in 1985. Jane Stabler notes that Lesley's name was 'a catalyst', which turned Dunn's attention to the future.[75] He sold the Newland Park house in 1983, and next year moved to Tayport with his new partner. However, if we disregard biography for a moment, we can argue that 'Leaving Dundee' easily fits into the correspondence of motifs, as it incorporates earlier references in the volume. The poet reaches comfort from grief in 'Home Again' when, through envisioning his first wife's quasi-religious absorption in the ordinary environment, he seems to find the settlement of his troubles despite subsequent slips back to earlier phases of mourning. In 'Home Again' the feeling of familiarity links up with the idea of returning home, and furnishes an interpretation which is applicable both on a physical and metaphysical level. Dunn's decision in 'Leaving Dundee' to return to Hull represents his self-liberation from the first Lesley's trying moral testament, and from the past and all that it entails. However, without a knowledge of Dunn's biography, many readers, including students, tend to read the poem as the poet's invitation to his departed wife, and that one, too, seems to be a supportable interpretation. By inviting his dead

[75] Stabler, 'Biography', 13.

wife to join him, after he has done away with the penitence and regret which grief often entails, Dunn declares that now he is able to take on all the delight and misery of the memory of their married life with a liberated soul in this beautifully written memento of everlasting love:

> Down there, over the green and the railway yards,
> Across the broad, rain-misted, subtle Tay,
> The road home trickles to a house, a door.
> She spoke of what I might do "afterwards".
> "Go, somewhere else." I went north to Dundee.
> Tomorrow I won't live here any more,
> Nor leave alone. *My love, say you'll come with me.*
> (*E*, 64)

In general, Dunn's suggestion that 'visible ordinariness can be haunted and transformed by the feelings of the moment'[76] may inform us about the ways in which the tangible natural environment becomes the inspiration for lyrical poetry in *Elegies*. Partly evolving from *St Kilda's Parliament*, this volume confirms, and provides a firm personal motivation for, the possible use of the Scottish landscape as a catalyst in both the private and the public aspects of Dunn's verse. *Elegies* prepares for the crossing of the boundaries of lyricism in a politicised way in the subsequent *Northlight*, where he associates the natural environment with the history of the people who populate the land. In that book Dunn converts landscape into a fixed entity, not just for himself as earlier, but also for the members of a larger community, and by transforming the land into a depository of collective memory he enables an inclusive but essentially lyrical dialogue 'between the tradition and the present that is open to the future'.[77]

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[76] Douglas Dunn, 'Noticing Such Things', *The English Review*, 2.2 (1991), 14-17 (p. 14).
[77] Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 205.

# Chapter Four

# A Caledonian Hidalgo

### Nature lyric and history in *Northlight*

At the end of 1983 Dunn sold the Newland Park house in Hull and early next year he settled down with his new partner, Lesley Bathgate, in Tayport. This small Scottish town on the southern bank of the River Tay overlooks the firth with its two great bridges and the city of Dundee across the water. Although he has moved since then, from 1984 on Dunn has lived in North-East Fife, to which he has developed a profound and lasting affiliation. 1984 was also the year when the first poems later collected in the 1988 volume *Northlight* appeared in print. This chapter accounts for the ways in which landscape, history and nationality converge in the voice of an essentially lyrical poet to construct a new, East of Scotland identity, which will determine the further development of Dunn's characteristic mode of expression and concerns throughout the 1990s.

Public history converges with private emotion in *Northlight* and the theme is introduced in 'At Falkland Palace'. Given that Dunn remarried in 1985, the poem could be an epithalamium but it is also imbued with the poet's newly found commitment to the place. In his own comment, it is a poem about 'being in a particular place at an affirmative moment in a relationship' (*WTD*, 94). Emblematically, that 'particular place' is a historic location. It follows from Dunn's emotional involvement that his view of history becomes even more subjective in this collection and he is now less interested in providing an alternative historiography. The way he perceives the past may remind us rather of a private version of collective memory, in which mythology and imagination play the key roles. Concerning the

background of 'At Falkland Palace', he admits the importance of imagination in a gently ironic way: 'in the compositional fantasy found and enjoyed in writing the poem, I was, momentarily, a fake Stewart grandee of the late sixteenth century when Scotland was still itself, and [...] this Caledonian hidalgo found himself in Falkland Palace with his lady, in 1982' (*WTD*, 94). As he notes, the poem is 'about returning to Scotland' (*WTD*, 94), and we may argue that in this act of solidarity his view of history has a central part to play. I pointed out above the formation of a chronological sense as an essential requisite for expressing association with a place and a community throughout Dunn's first three books. The preceding chapters also highlighted the retrospective (often nostalgic and cataloguing) nature of his imagination in his dialogues with Scotland and Europe. He finds the appropriate object of his chronicler's interest in his adopted home, the historic Kingdom of Fife. Even the form he applies in 'At Falkland Palace', which reverberates the tempo of the fourteen-line stanzas of Alexander Montgomerie's sixteenth-century poem 'The Cherry and the Slae', indicates the need of historical legacy for him. While in *Europa's Lover* history involved a degree of cultural generalisation and in *St Kilda's Parliament* its assumed decline stood as the reminder of a supposed absence of ethical stance in Scottish life, now in 'Daylight' he promotes the past of one specific area:

> this little place
> Observes its vulnerable trace
> On time, topography and globe.
> (*N*, 11)

'At Falkland Palace' celebrates the promise of new life in May in the 'apple-promise' and the 'song-crazed laverock', as well as the harmony found in the

awakening nature: 'Edenic circumstance, not fall' (*N*, 1). By contending the liveliness of spring with the attractive but deteriorating and lifeless building ('Dynastic stonework flakes', *N*, 2), Dunn clashes two different notions of temporality: a cyclic view based on the annual change of seasons (which forms the basis of metaphoric apprehensions of time from primeval myths to the Christian calendar) with a linear view, which is measured with chronometers, and is recorded in history books. I pointed out that Dunn's nostalgia involves a linear perception, and we could see that he did not introduce in his poetry the idea of time and history renewing itself prior to *Europa's Lover*. 'At Falkland Palace' seems to assert that while nature rejuvenates itself every year, in human history golden age gives way to decline: that once glorious palace of the Stewarts is now 'monarchy's urn', and becomes the symbol of a 'posthumous/ Nation' (*N*, 2). Sceptically enough, the poem does not suggest a promise of rebirth; there is only a constant deferral of action: 'history bemoans/ What history postpones' (*N*, 2). Here the reader is made to feel that no relief can be found, except in a Horatian retreat to a private world. The advocating of this *modus vivendi*, however, does not entail a call for turning one's back on the community, and neither would it be entirely accurate to translate it as Dunn's disappointment with society. Instead of refusing to deal with historical and social dilemmas, in *Northlight* he chooses only to approach them from a different direction: through a lyrical identification with the place and its history, and with a woman who gives this history a new life, rather than inventing a self in direct relation to the community.

The idiom of 'At Falkland Palace' is resonant with the modes of expression of medieval spring songs in the first half, and chivalric poetry in the closing lines of this energetic, and both stylistically and technically accomplished poem. The almost Platonic veneration of the woman as expressed in the last quintet finds its way into

the explicit but tender eroticism of the subsequent piece, 'Love-making by Candlelight'. If in the first poem love pervades history, now history infuses the realm of love:

> Skin looked like this two hundred years ago
> When candlelight lapped the erotic straw.
> (*N*, 3)

Although Dunn established the ethereal nature of his love poetry much earlier, in the delicate lyricism of such pieces as 'Love Poem' and 'Cosmologist' in *Terry Street*, and 'Rose' in *St Kilda's Parliament*, the characteristic ornamentation of the poems in *Northlight* is indebted rather to the stylistic elevation earned in *Elegies*. In 'Love-making by Candlelight' the surrealistic juxtaposition of a daring use of abstract nouns with objects or events from everyday reality, for instance in the line 'Timeless in the bedroom of the species' (*N*, 3), invites comparison with *Elegies*, with lines such as 'history closing/ Its bedroom door' from 'Snow Days' (*E*, 54) or 'Time was out/ Walking his dog' from 'Thirteen Steps and the Thirteenth of March' (*E*, 14). Further tokens of such conceptual extension from one book to the other are the motifs of light and candle. Not unlike in *Elegies*, these two motifs play a part in creating the book's lyrical mood and spiritual atmosphere, and, as the book's title and the picture of a lighthouse on the cover also suggest, become the symbols of continuity across times and eras: 'History candle, yellow metaphor' (*N*, 4).

When inventing a local identity, Dunn's imagination reaches back to the earliest times of the half-mythological Pictish forebears – half-mythological because they are an ancestral race in Scotland of whose language no written trace remains. His lyricism migrates between dream and reality as today's eastern seaboard of Scotland transforms into a 'Pictish Coast' in '75°' (*N*, 18). In the concluding stanza

of 'Love-making by Candlelight' Dunn interprets the romantic but ephemeral moments of married 'venery' in terms of such fabled and tragic-fated couples as Tristan and Iseult, or Dido and Aeneas. He was concerned with creating a private mythology out of personal experience in *Elegies*, but on occasions like this the reader has an insight into the privatisation of public memory. In 'S. Frediano's' he gives other evidence of his aspiration to personalise (this time religious) mythology. He draws attention to the often forgotten historical detail that the Tuscan saint known as St Frediano (or St Finnian) came from South-East Scotland, from Ayrshire, and was probably a Gaelic speaker. The pious monk is envisaged here as the pre-figuration of those later Scots who set out into the world in search of exotic careers in remote places. Although he does not say so in the poem, no doubt Dunn is more than half-convinced that St Frediano, too, departed from his native parish in the hope of a wee godly adventure, or at least a warmer climate. Dunn has a special interest in similar life stories, dedicating a complete chapter to Scots abroad in his 1991 *Scotland: An Anthology*. 'S. Frediano's' is in sharp contrast with the other poems, provided that in *Northlight* Dunn generally proposes lyrical diction, but the style we encounter here is benevolently jocose as well as ironically distancing. He characterises the church with its international congregation of tourists as 'a human place' (*N*, 6). Its peopled scenery also makes this particular poem unusual in a collection where the reader is typically offered unpopulated landscapes only inhabited by the observer. These empty scenes, which derive from the private world of the seashores and forests of *St Kilda's Parliament* and *Elegies*, reveal that for Dunn the spirit of history is bound to the land rather than to those who live there. This is also true the other way round: for Dunn the spirit of the place tends to be historical.

In the vast but fragmented journey across time and geography in *Europa's Lover* Dunn presented the reader with a multiplicity of 'Swiss seconds' as the broken

glass of a once grand narrative of history, but in *Northlight* he wants to retrieve the single moment which allows us to view past, present and future in one great sweep. He first reaches that lyrical moment in 'The People Before':

> Preliminary moonlight on the Firth
> Casts in-betweenness on the time and light –
> Not now, not then, not day, not night,
> But moonlight's childhood, waterworn;
> And, in one moment, all death, all birth,
> All dying and being reborn.
> (*N*, 8)

The poem clearly inherits the idea of the infinite cycle of death and regeneration from Europa's monologue. Although one needs to remember that Dunn is careful not to philosophise his poems deliberately, these lines may recall that heroic atheist, Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence. Taking Dunn's admitted atheism into account, as in the case of the German thinker, this may be functioning as a substitute, a metaphysical comfort in the absence of faith in Providence.

More problematic is, however, what Dunn means by 'in-betweenness' in the poem. Cairns Craig contends that Dunn 'explores [the] in-betweenness of existence, the "in-betweenness" that is the space between known and completed forms and the unknowable significance of the present'.[1] In the light of the idea of eternal recurrence, it is unlikely that for Dunn any form can be finite. Moreover, as it may be clear from the way he underlines the importance of a constant reinterpretation of history in Sean O'Brien's interview,[2] in his opinion probably no form can be known, either. Dunn does not take the 'in-betweenness of existence' for granted, but rather regards it as a privileged moment (a fleeting state of bliss, we could say if he was a

[1] Cairns Craig, 'Northlight' [a review of *N*], *Scottish Literary Journal*, Supplement 32 (1990), 60-64 (p. 62).
[2] O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil', 26.

religious poet) which has to be earned, and in which any possibility of comprehending things may emerge. Craig further elaborates the idea of in-betweenness in his *Out of History*, tracing it through the work of such paradigmatically 'peripheral' writers as Yeats, Heaney, Tom Leonard, Kelman, Dunn, Lochhead (peripheral by way of her female poetic voice), Morgan and MacLean. Craig concludes on the following consequential point:

> The condition of "being between" is not the degeneration of a culture but the essential means of its generation. The upsurge in regionalism in British poetry in the past thirty years may be a mirror-image of the vernacularisation of Englishes throughout the world but it is a mistake to see that mirror-image of the centre and the periphery as something new: all cultures exist not in themselves – in the autonomy and the autotelic trajectory of their own narratives – but in the relations between themselves and others. Culture is not an organism, nor a totality, nor a unity: it is the site of a dialogue, it is a dialectic, a dialect. It is being between.[3]

He argues for the deferral of categorical definitions in the identity construction of the former peripheries, also promoting the non-finite image of a multicultural and multidialectal Scotland. The distinction of 'self' and 'other' first, and second, the installation of a dialogic relationship between them may remind the reader of Bakhtin's dialogic theory. In his *Identifying Poets*, Crawford provides a more comprehensive survey of the dialogic principle in contemporary Scottish literature than Craig, though the latter scholar deserves the credit for grasping what is fixed in the fluidity of the dialogic relationship in this notion of 'being between'. In a manner not unrelated to Craig's argument, Homi K. Bhabha stresses the problematic nature of defining the concept of 'nation':

[3] Craig, *Out of History*, 205-206.

> The "locality" of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as "other" in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/ inside must always itself be a process of hybridity.[4]

At the root of the dislocation of nationality there is what Bhabha calls 'conceptual indeterminacy',[5] or in other words, an infinite postponement of signification, which in turn will lead to a potentially endless negotiation of meanings in '*in-between* spaces', such as 'between cultures and nations, theories and texts, the political, the poetic and the painterly, the past and the present'.[6]

This takes us to the following point: what is Dunn's own intuition of the cultural significance of in-betweenness? It is doubtful to what extent he could identify himself with what has developed into a characteristically postmodernist approach, given his admitted antipathy to such categories. He likes to rely on the nineteenth-century French thinker, Ernest Renan's definition of nation as being 'a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future'.[7] This definition is widely known, though what may bring us even closer to understanding Dunn's national sentiment is not the dictum itself, but the context in which it is supposed to be interpreted. Renan wrote:

> A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the

[4] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Introduction: narrating the nation', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 1-7 (p. 4).
[5] Ibid., 2.
[6] Ibid., 4.
[7] Ernest Renan, 'What is a nation?', trans. by Martin Thom, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 8-22 (p. 19).

> other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.[8]

It is indicative of the abiding relevance of Renan's ideas that his essay features as the first chapter of Bhabha's *Nation and Narration*. Repeating the French thinker nearly word by word, Anderson also interprets the nation as 'a deep, horizontal comradeship'.[9] However, I might add there are others who contemplated nationality in much the same way before Renan. Hutchinson explains that for cultural nationalists, such as Herder or Vico, nations are 'natural solidarities', and most of all '*organic* beings, living personalities'.[10] I do not assume that Dunn is a cultural nationalist in the historical sense of the term, but when he publicly associates himself with Renan's opinion, he relies on an ethical resource which is similar to what we may also find in Herder and his followers: a belief in benevolence and natural order. Moralism is an understated but enduring undercurrent that comes to surface in some of Dunn's poems, and is observable in his general approach to lyricism.

Renan seems to imply that solidarity acts as the major force of continuity in the life of a nation by linking the legacies of the past with the desires of the future, and as such, it always belongs to the present tense. In *Northlight* Dunn is concerned with defining the subject of that solidarity (rather than negotiating authority as earlier), and so he needs to occupy a space which is in-between different forms of temporality (and not between cultural or political ideologies). In 'At Falkland Palace', he explores the hiatus between linearity and a cyclic view of time and in 'The People Before' he tries to create imaginative access to the single representative

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2nd rev. and extended edn (London: Verso, 1991), 7.
[10] John Hutchinson, 'Cultural Nationalism and Moral Regeneration', in *Nationalism*, ed. by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, Oxford Readers Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 122-31 (p. 122).

moment between the unfinished past and future. Here he aims to provide North-East Fife and Tayside with signification in the domain of poetry, so as to give them an identity in time. Of course, he must be aware that this hermeneutic identity transforms with the change of times, just as he must know that, as Bhabha said, no (national) culture is 'unitary in relation to itself'. As a consequence, the constitution of cohesive semantic systems necessarily, and desirably, remains an infinite process. These poems seem to imply that in Dunn's intuition the poet's imagination has the potential to secure continuity in that endless process, in order to defy the fragmentation of collective consciousness.

Related to general notions about the multilingual nature of modern Scottish poetry, Craig also suggests a linguistic explanation of 'in-betweenness'. In his opinion Dunn refers to a recess 'where the world hovers between the incomplete present and the fulfilled languages of the past, or between the languages of the landscape and the as yet unexpressed experience of the individual who inhabits them'.[11] We have to bear in mind that, as I pointed out above, Dunn does not take Scotland's present linguistic instability as an unconditional advantage for the poet. And although it remains a point of debate in what sense a language can be 'fulfilled', from a diachronic viewpoint it is not impossible to make out a case for Craig's argument. A language of the past in relation to the incompleteness of the present emerges in 'Going to Aberlemno':

> Through astral solitude
> A Pictish dialect,
> Above a bridged Firth, cries
> For lyric nationhood.
> (*N*, 13)

[11] Craig, 'Northlight', 62.

But it is essential to see that for Dunn language belongs to the domain of subjectivity. Just as a dialect of the past can be overheard in 'astral solitude', he asserts the privacy of the language of the present in the opening lines of 'At Falkland Place':

> Innermost dialect
> Describes Fife's lyric hills,
> Life, love and intellect
> In lucid syllables.
> (*N*, 1)

The poet's 'in-betweenness' is not merely a linguistic position, but, probably more importantly, a spiritual or lyrical one, too. It is in the lyrical moment that the various dimensions of life intersect: times, places, existence and non-existence. Dunn complicates the theme of 'The People Before' further in 'Daylight':

> I've seen a star poised on the tip
> Of a still leaf, pure partnership
> Here makes with there and everywhere
> Between life, death and forever.
> (*N*, 12)

The combined image of the infinitely small and the infinitely great leads on to Dunn's vision of history. He imagines the spirit of history as a small and vulnerable creature, rather than a grandiose Faustian phenomenon, in 'Abernethy': 'Light on the grass, a shivering/ Transparent wing' (*N*, 14). No doubt, he has assimilated a metaphysical view of history, which brings into question the significance of spiritualism and imagination for the formulation of local (and, indirectly, national) historical identities. As Benedict Anderson argues, the historical evolution of modern

national consciousness was encouraged, among other things, by the diffusion of print, which 'made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways'.[12] Drawing on Renan, Anderson also maintains that every nation is 'imagined' or 'invented', since 'the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members [...], yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.[13] Well before the publication of Anderson's book, Dunn gave the title 'An Imaginary Nation' to a poem sequence which forms a part of the historical tableaux 'Anon's People' and in that sequence he described Scotland as 'an imagined nation'.[14] In the Scottish context, the phrase carries a more particular connotation than merely referring to the general truth that every nation's self-image is fictitious, as it is a form of consent reached among its members. Literature has played a particularly important role in not just creating, but also defending that consent in Scotland. Dunn used the phrase 'a country re-inventing itself' when describing the identity-conscious literary life of the post-1979 Referendum decade in 'Scottish Cadence and Scottish Life',[15] and claimed that in political terms the country was then a 'fiction': 'It has its varieties of place, people, temperaments, languages, its cities, landscapes, its business, its industry, its employed and unemployed, its rich and poor – it has everything except citizenship'.[16] He acknowledges in the same essay the role of the arts in the preservation of Scottish cultural identities against false and simplistic images, political non-existence, or just indifference.

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[12] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 36.
[13] Ibid., 6.
[14] Dunn, 'Anon's People', 7.
[15] Douglas Dunn, 'Scottish Cadence and Scottish Life', *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 October 1988, p. 1202, contd. 1213, (p. 1213).
[16] Ibid., 1202.

Similarly, the title of 'Memory and Imagination', which is a central poem in *Northlight*, refers to the unity of historical consciousness and artistic creativity in the context of collective self-definition. Dunn's use of the word 'memory' seems to imply a sense of collective memory, which reaches back to the community's mythological, imagined origins, when 'Columban saints [...] navigate on stones' (*N*, 67). If earlier in 'Snow Days' Dunn identified Scotland with the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite, in 'Memory and Imagination' he associates Tayside with another mythological woman, Artemis, a nature-goddess whose important attribute is virginity. Here he is only one step away from the rhetorical question he will formulate in 'Body Echoes': 'Is it in love that nationhood begins...?' (*DDK*, 63). Dunn's attitude to history is not only infused with mythology, but is also of a highly aesthetic nature, as the introductory lines of 'Memory and Imagination' reveal:

> Metre's continuum
> Articulates
> An artless view of water, sky and slates.
> Rhythmical memory,
> Archival drum.
> (*N*, 65)

The coalescence of the prehistoric memory of drum beat and the rhythm of today's poetry suggests that art pervades the whole human existence, attending us through time in an 'aesthetic universe' (*N*, 68). One may rise above the particulars of life to a higher imaginative or spiritual level with the help of art, as is objectified in the poem's all-inclusive perspective: not only are we invited to survey the quotidian 'Over the roofs, past chimneypots/ Toward the river's tidal pulse' (*N*, 65), but, as Dunn describes in 'Here and There', we may also move 'on a curve/ That's capable of upwards into grace' (*N*, 29). The spiritual consequence of art makes history,

pervaded and remodelled by art, the subject of a similarly inclusive overview. Memory and imagination may meet in any branch of the arts for Dunn, in the way that the artist has the potential to conceive the in-betweenness of the lyrical moment in which the incompleteness of past and future may encounter, and inform us here and now:

> Transfigured fact and elevated dream
> Perpetuate their metrical verbatim
> Into the metronomic clock
> Where here
> Meets there
> And now meets then,
> That hard frontier
> Where pencil, paint, wood, stone
> And numbered rhyme
> Converse with music on the edge of time.
> (*N*, 68-69)

Even the physical shape of 'Memory and Imagination' suggests temporal continuity. In the same way as poetry forms an imaginative bridge between what is over and what is to come, the narrow lines scrolling down six pages evoke a sense of spanning across space. The alternation of the shorter and longer lines may remind us of the hourglass shape, as in the quotation above. There is no reference to this particular instrument, though images of different chronometers do occur repeatedly in Dunn's poems: the wristwatch in *Europa's Lover*; the sundial in *Terry Street* and *Elegies*; and in *Northlight* we find the phrase 'Pictavian clock' in 'Abernethy' (*N*, 14) and 'metronomic clock' in 'Memory and Imagination' (*N*, 68). Indeed, the periodic indentation of the shorter lines as opposed to the left alignment of the longer ones visually summons up the swing of the metronome, which is used to mark out and divide the stretch of time in which a piece of music creates its aesthetic effect. Poetry, like music, takes place in time, so it is particularly suitable to express and

reflect continuity, as opposed to visual arts like painting, sculpture or photography. As pointed out, the guard of this continuity may be the poet, who stands at the crossroads of temporal and spatial dimensions. The poet's imagination establishes links between the past and the future of a community by providing it with an identity in the always happening present tense: 'A sense, a memory/ In all dimensions of the sentient' (*N*, 70). For all that, it would be problematic to describe Dunn as a poet for the community, just as he carefully rails himself off from the role of the recluse, too. 'The notion of "the outsider" is an unhappy one, but an uncritical identification with a place and its people could be even worse', he wrote shortly after the publication of *Northlight*.[17] When I suggest that the poet may have access to the mystery of in-betweenness, I do so in the context of Dunn's book only, without assuming that every poet should share this temperament. It is safe to say, though, that he possesses such sensibility. I quoted above Kinloch, who saw the poise of Dunn's poetry embodied in 'the listening tilt' (as expressed in *Europa's Lover*), and I suggest that the same intensity of receptivity characterises the world of *Northlight*. Massie portrays him, 'like Hardy, a noticing writer'.[18] As in *Elegies*, a meditative absorption in observing the natural environment can take us closer to supernatural secrets in 'Abernethy':

> Listen to twigs scratch as a broom
> Swishes across a vanished room
> Trembling on this venerable
> And enigmatic hill.
> (*N*, 14-15)

[17] Dunn, 'Noticing Such Things', 16.
[18] Alan Massie, 'Northern Lines' [a review of *N*], *Punch*, 7 October 1988, p. 63.

Dunn's historical sensibility merges with a committed attentiveness to spirituality, and like his interest in the past, this spiritual concern, too, becomes affiliated with the place. It is probably the most striking feature of the book that its geography is confined to a relatively small and well-defined area, to North-East Fife and the Firth of Tay. In his essay 'The Pride of Fife', Dunn describes the places that feature in *Northlight*:

> The countryside suits my eye and imagination. [...] I don't expect to see unicorns, but on the low hills, silhouetted ridges, in a countryside full of corners and a quick exchange of prospects, it is easy to imagine a glimpse of something mysterious as it peeps shyly from its timeless world and into this one. North Fife particularly invites you to accept its lore.[19]

He has never returned to Dundee to live there. Tayport, where he has found his new home, is a small outpost of the northern seaport on the opposite side of the river, and, as Herbert observes, in *Northlight* Dundee 'exists as a view, not a reality'.[20] Draper distinguishes between different kinds of regional poetry depending on whether they are dedicated to a landscape or a community.[21] But I should make it clear at this point that Dunn's treatment of landscape provides for a broader dialogue with everything a land may signify, including, though seldom directly, its residents. The following extract from a short essay by Dunn may be illuminating of his approach:

> Place is more than a stretch and reach as far as the eye can see. Like the way we think about time, place bleeds away from the artificial boundaries of property and administrative tradition. It is self, character, and the bias of mind, imagination and awareness it encourages, the tempo and the run of the

[19] Douglas Dunn, 'The Pride of Fife: A Poet's Impressions of the Royal Kingdom', *Departures*, July/August (1989), 42-49 (p. 44).
[20] W. N. Herbert, 'Dunn and Dundee', 135.
[21] R. P. Draper, 'Introduction', in *The Literature of Region and Nation*, ed. by R. P. Draper (London: Macmillan, 1989), 1-9 (p. 9).

> grain of identity; it is love, house, hereditary connections, a glimpse of *res publica*, inhabitants, and *a representative of nation and humanity*.[22]

Dunn's attention gradually turns to the pastoral scenery of a typically agricultural district, although at this point the view of the estuary, especially its light effects, also acts as a major catalyst in his writing. 'Where I live faces north-east and I work by the light of its geography and latitude', he writes on the inspiration of *Northlight*.[23] The book's cover shows the engraving of an old lighthouse off Tayport which does not operate any more, but in Dunn's imagination it 'survives as a [...] sentinel, a guardian'[24] – and as a correlative for the poet's self, we might add. 'Light' is a keyword in *Northlight*, and occurs in more than a third of the poems in various compounds, such as 'candlelight', 'daylight', moonlight', 'northlight', 'roselight', 'waterlight', 'winterlight' and 'worldlight'. The book's title alludes to the preference of painters and artists (such as Dunn's wives) for a 'north light', that is a room lit by a window facing north. It is helpful to view the use of this motif in the context of the metaphysicalism of Dunn's pastoral poetry. In order to explain its function, I briefly return to *Elegies*, where light evokes the world of the spirit or fantasy on the one hand, and is also a medium or agent that helps the artist reinvent nature on the other. 'A floral light/ Bleaches my eye with angelophanous/ Secrets', Dunn records in 'Home Again' (*E*, 52), and Lesley herself, as a photographer, could 'write with light'.[25] The motif acquires a similar role in *Northlight*. While in surrealistic compounds it kindles mystical sentiments, it also becomes a means of artistic invention for the poet, of 'reconstruct[ing] a self', as Dunn says in 'Here and There'

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[22] Douglas Dunn, '*Northlight*: Douglas Dunn writes on the background to this quarter's Choice', *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, 138 (1988), 3-4 (p. 3). Second emphasis added.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 4.
[25] Dunn, 'Writing with Light' (*E*, 23).

(*N*, 26). Parallel to the Christian myth of genesis, where the first act of Creation is the making of light, in Dunn's verse light may be regarded as a metaphor of creative imagination, aiming to provide an otherwise neutral natural environment with subjectivity.

The incorporeal quality of light engenders a sublime atmosphere, and, as a consequence, lyricism deeply infuses Dunn's view of nature in *Northlight*. Fife's hills are 'lyric' (*N*, 1) and 'enigmatic' (*N*, 15), but he can discreetly counteract such panoramic generalisations by returning to Andrew Young's 'botanical sensibility', which delights in the small-scale poetics of 'leaf and bloom', and which Dunn encourages in competition with the design of MacDiarmid's geological poetry (*PSP*, 273). Dunn's dialogue with the 'summer's agents' in the six-poem sequence '75°' (*N*, 16) comes probably the closest to the purpose he describes in prose. Rather than through a reasoning, typically late-MacDiarmidian type of verse, which involves a distance between the poet and the subject that serves to illustrate or underpin the argument, in his nature poetry Dunn chooses the 'paths of inner wanderlust' (*N*, 18), so as to approach the spiritual secrets of North-East Fife. In an attempt to be 'faithful to what it depicts' (*N*, 18), he projects the inwardness of his lyricism onto the northern weather in '75°'. Predictably from the positions he occupied vis-à-vis various communities in his earlier books, now he is prone to maintain this newly-found version of *Innerlichkeit* in relation to the land in the first place rather than to its inhabitants. He suggests that in Ted Hughes and Charles Tomlison 'there's an experience of landscape without a predicament of self' and that the poet 'in a sense becomes the landscape or a personless purveyor of narrative and description', and notes that this is an exemplary quality in both technical and ethical terms.[26] He

[26] Andrew Zawacki, 'Douglas Dunn: An Interview', *Verse*, 15.1-2 (1998), 15-23 (p. 17).

argues elsewhere that the region has 'an identity separate from those of its owners'.[27] He approaches collective identity by indirect ways in *Northlight*, through developing a spiritual affiliation with the local landscape. Chronological awareness and local identity also merge in Dunn's nature poetry. 'Fife has a spirit of its own, one that rolls through time and events with an obscure but powerful significance', he says.[28] Elsewhere he also suggests that Fife seems to him to be involved in his 'interior Third World', and represents 'a different time zone from London, Paris or New York'.[29] It is a spiritual significance, which, as in *Elegies*, cannot be attained through an analytical mode of understanding, but only by way of lyrical reflection and an empathetic identification with a quasi-pantheistic environment.

In contemporary literature, Ian Gregson argues, 'the writing of traditional lyric poetry has become less possible'.[30] Not only is Gregson's use of 'traditional' problematic in this context, but also it may be contended that a stratum in Dunn's poetry develops in the direction of pure lyricism in *Northlight* inasmuch as his spiritual perception of nature reacts on the mode of his writing. 'Place exerts an odd, irrational influence on how you write, on form and technique, or so I believe, although my conviction is almost entirely a matter of instinct', Dunn wrote on the background of the collection.[31] Certainly, this is not to assume that pastoral verse eliminates the polemic or the dramatic strain from his apparatus, but there are times when even the argumentation is filtered through the moods or sentiments of a lyrical subject, as in 'Here and There'. If, as some of his critics do,[32] one imagines Dunn as

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[27] Dunn, 'The Pride of Fife', 49.
[28] Ibid.
[29] R. Goff, 'Douglas Dunn: An Interview', *Very Green: New Arts Magazine* (1986), 10-12 (p. 12).
[30] Gregson, '"There are many worlds": The "Dialogic" in *Terry Street* and After', 29.
[31] Dunn, '*Northlight*...', 4.
[32] See, for instance: John Bayley, 'A Poet More Than Himself' [a review of *DDK* and *Reading Douglas Dunn*, ed. by Robert Crawford and David Kinloch], *Poetry Review*, 84.2 (1994), 54-55; Nicholson, 'Dimensions of the Sentient'; O'Brien, 'Dunn and Politics' and *The Deregulated Muse*; and O'Donoghue, 'Moving Towards a Vernacular of Compassion'.

torn between the apparently dichotomous concerns of political activism and artistic disengagement, one may easily be tempted to visualise his verse as oscillating between two conflicting extremes without ever reaching an unconditional commitment to either. However, despite Dunn's own earlier depicting of his poetry as a train commuting between 'Social Responsibility and Romantic Sleep',[33] I suggest that these two motivations are simultaneously present in his sensibility. In other words: rather than locked in an irreconcilably dialectical relationship, when either compulsion gains emphasis its opposite may also be there in Dunn's poetic voice.

Dunn provides his own definition of lyricism:

> Lyricism is one kind of poetry, and an effect of the kind and other kinds of poetry in which lyricism can appear. We can say that it is an effect of poetry when the writer succeeds in creating a song-like utterance through spoken or written language. We can say that it is released through feeling, through emotion that is sometimes in touch with intellect, but sometimes disregarding the active or conscious intelligence. We can say too that it is implicated in spacious imagery and figurative ingenuity, and that it is a visual effect of poetry, or else sensuous in ways other than the melodic or the audible, as when a poet can convey the illusion of fragrance or touch. We can also say that it is often spiritual in its implications even when the means of achieving this are profane or factual. (*IL*, 2)

Thus the term may refer to a genre, a poetic effect, a certain type of style or imagery, and a poetic disposition. The first two (genre and effect) are not problematic areas. He enlarges upon the third factor (a style or imagery) in the context of the social determinants of modern verse in the above discussed 'The Predicament of Scottish Poetry', where he says: 'Sensuously imaginative phrase-making is not what is

[33] Dunn says, 'I'm on a train that puffs between two stations. One is Romantic Sleep, the other is Social Realism. If I ever get off the train, I don't know what station it will be at'. In: Douglas Dunn, 'Statement', in *Corgi Modern Poets in Focus: I*, ed. by Dannie Abse (London: Corgi, 1971), 106-107 (p. 107).

expected of a Scottish poet' (*PSP*, 273). He suggests in the same essay that the loss in prestige of 'the design of delight or a surrender to imagination' in recent verse was the logical consequence of what he sees as a demeaning type of social and cultural conditioning of the mind (*PSP*, 273). On the other hand, he adds, this repression may originate from within, when the poet aspires to live up to extra-literary (political, sociolinguistic, psychological, etc.) prejudices, stereotypes, or to the prescriptivism that has a long-established tradition in Scottish criticism. But more important is now the last implication of lyricism as a poetic disposition, which we may briefly define as the poet's moral and spiritual autonomy that makes it possible for him or her to identify and honestly follow innermost convictions in representations of any kind of subject without being distracted by a wish to gratify non-aesthetic expectations. I shall return to the point why we should not see a discord between the public and private implications of art below, when discussing 'A Theory of Literary Criticism', suggesting now only that, as Dunn seems to imply in 'The Predicament of Scottish Poetry', it is not the different nature of the two impulses but the poet's failure to recognise his or her own relation to them that may give rise to the appearance of such incompatibility.[34]

Laying a similar degree of emphasis on integrity, Seamus Heaney locates the potential conflict at the same spot as Dunn when he writes, 'poetry is its own reality and no matter how much a poet may concede to the corrective pressures of social, moral, political and historical reality, the ultimate fidelity must be to the demands and promise of the artistic event'.[35] In Dunn's view, the poet must be able to adopt a

[34] For a detailed discussion of Dunn's definition of lyricism, see: Attila Dósa, '"...the kind of poetry I mean": Notes on Douglas Dunn's Criticism of Scottish Poetry', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 32 (2000), forthcoming.

[35] Seamus Heaney, 'The Government of the Tongue', in *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 91-108 (p. 101).

share of self-reliant imaginativeness – or what he calls 'a restful certitude' (*PSP*, 273) – in order to reach or recognise the lyrical moment, where, in his words:

> a poet lives at his or her most important, where words are written and spoken that in contemporary life might represent the last resource of the language, one in which we can still encounter the truthfulness that embarrasses superficial mendacity, ruthless self-interest and controversial expediency, while, at the same time, being disinterested enough not to have to admit to that or any other function. (*IL*, 16)

Dunn's understanding of the lyrical moment is consonant with Heaney's, who describes it as 'an experience of release' and 'a liberated moment', which, as Dunn suggests, has to be 'earned'.[36] It is also a moment when, to quote the Irish Laureate again, 'the lyric discovers its buoyant completion and the timeless formal pleasure comes to fullness and exhaustion', and when a 'plane is – fleetingly – established where the poet is intensified in his being and freed from his predicaments'.[37] In *Northlight* Dunn appears to explore this nearly mystical moment which may grant us a brief glimpse of the intensity and scope of existence from the in-between position of the lyrical poet.

Sean O'Brien notes on the relationship of politics and aestheticism that 'Having it both ways is one of the functions of the pastoral'.[38] Sometimes the withdrawal from society can be an act as profoundly political as direct engagement, and, without implying that he is a recluse, the same can be valid for much of Dunn's writing. What opens up the political horizon of pastoral poetry is of course the Horatian distancing of the self from society pointed out earlier. Representations of

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[36] Oxley, 'Interview with Douglas Dunn', 10-11.
[37] Seamus Heaney, 'The Interesting Case of Nero, Checkov's Cognac and a Knocker', in *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), xi-xxiii (p. xxii).
[38] O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse*, 65.

the cultivated natural environment in '75°', 'Apples' and 'Tremors' become at least as definitive as views of unpopulated scenes in general and the perspective of the River Tay in particular. We may note 'The Garden' in *The Happier Life* and 'Winter Orchard' in *Love or Nothing* as two important earlier examples of gardening verse by Dunn, a theme he continues in 'Garden Hints' in *Dante's Drum-kit*. In '75°' gardening lacks the (often politically motivated) allegorical function that domestic chores typically acquire in his poetry, as for example in 'The Apple Tree' in *St Kilda's Parliament*, where the cultivation of one's orchard conveys the moral imperative of Sisyphusean efforts, or in 'Ratatouille' in the same collection, where attentiveness to the pleasures of cooking and eating becomes a general pattern for openness, tolerance and political pacifism. Dunn's delight in details of the natural scenery furnishes much rather the kind of spiritual realism that leads to the apotheosis of the ordinary in '75°': 'watch a birch/ Assume serenity and search/ For its perfection' (*N*, 18). But the political element may infiltrate in the way that, like the Roman poet Virgil, Dunn is alert to the instability of the pastoral environment against various forms of external perils. 'Turbulence reaches here: the RAF/ Loosens the earwax', he writes in 'Here and There' (*N*, 27). 'A Snow Walk' evokes the wintry scenes of *Elegies*, but with a different consequence: the white landscape, which is favourable for its spiritual atmosphere in the earlier book, is now pregnant with imminent menace with its 'barbed fence' and 'chain-sawed' trees (*N*, 42) – not unlike in *Love or Nothing*. 'It feels too European', he complains with bitter irony at a surroundings where 'Home feels a life away and not an hour' (*N*, 42). In the garden setting of 'Tremors', when we see the achievement of peaceful domesticity being destroyed by earthquake (or 'sonic boom or nuclear mistake'), as 'Tilts on a row/ Landslided on the seeds' (*N*, 78), we are left to contemplate whether escapism could be the proper settlement of things. Likewise, in its companion poem 'The Patrol',

which is another unusually proportioned variation on the sonnet form, the transformation of the soil where 'A rifle's imprint stops grass growing' (*N*, 79) hints at an earlier intrusion of violence in the world of privacy.

The negativistic images of the British military force in 'Here and There' and 'The Patrol' bring into question Dunn's national identity on a supra-ethnic level – a persuasion which, with the exception of the Irish, still unites politically the peoples of the geographical area that he likes to call with a hint of scepticism the 'North-West European Archipelago'.[39] He rejects the notion of 'Britishness': 'for a start, I don't believe it exists, except as a notion of the ruling class and the military'.[40] In 'Adventure's Oafs' he draws from the political reality of a pre-devolution Scotland, ruled by a 'government a quarter voted for' (*N*, 80), the only logical conclusion about history and power relations:

> It's yesterday; tomorrow's not tomorrow.
> So carry your kicked arse in a wheelbarrow.
> (*N*, 81)

The lyrical tone of the book takes a somewhat unanticipated turn in the last few poems when, bringing up the otherwise often challenged idea of inner colonisation, Dunn re-engages in a debate over the ideology of inferiorism in a manner similar to what he proposed in 'Barbarian Pastorals' and in the first half of *St Kilda's Parliament*: 'You're colonized! Maybe you didn't know?' (*N*, 81). Beveridge and Turnbull explore in detail the concept of inner colonisation in *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture*, published a year after *Northlight* came out. Drawing on Fanon's findings in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the two authors assert that in the British context negative

[39] Dósa, 'A Different Drummer', 29.
[40] O'Donoghue, 'An Interview with Douglas Dunn', 46.

cultural images have principally functioned to 'reinforce Scotland's political subordination'.[41] Dunn points out a not dissimilar relationship between politics and culture:

> Our political identity is made to look as if it doesn't count. So, too, the cultural identities of Scotland. It's a climate in which unhappiness, thwarts, hopelessness, and anger are encouraged to breed. I believe that positive steps should be taken, and soon, before it gets worse; and I see hope for this in the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly.[42]

Reminding the reader of the Scottish national movement's peaceful temperament (frequently noted by Dunn), 'Adventure's Oafs' draws to a profoundly satirical ending in which the fair play award goes to the nationalists:

> Civil Insurgency! The Trojan Horse!
> It's hand-to-hand inside the dummy house.
> Upstairs, they find their scarecrow Minotaurs,
> Rebels of straw, innocent, infamous.
> (*N*, 81)

In 'The Dark Crossroads', which is set in an unfriendly English pub that works like a magnifying lens through which we may inspect the surface of ethnic prejudice and hatred, Dunn asserts that in the absence of differences in citizenship, language or skin colour, even accent may arouse the psychological need of racial discrimination. Although he discredits nationalism shortly after the publication of *Northlight* – 'There is nothing like nationalism for creating hotheads'[43] –, the speaker in his poem is pleased to imagine as 'Voice-niggers and any-shade victims of skin/

[41] Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture*, Determinations Series (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), 1.
[42] O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil', 17-18.
[43] Ibid., 21.

Devise their slave revolts' (*N*, 63). As Sean O'Brien notes, Dunn's 'anger remains linguistic'[44]: 'bloodlust/ Soured into ink' (*N*, 64). What else could it be, one might ask, given that a poet's artistic medium is language? Dunn likes to see the conditions of the (re)emergence of diverse national literatures within the United Kingdom as well as on the 'peripheries' of the old empire 'not so much [as] a question of "Britishness" or "Britishism" as of the English language'.[45] He maintains that the Scots' is a minority literature,[46] and although there are certain common denominators between the cultures of the British Isles, in his words, 'there's too much resistance from each of them [...] for these tentatively shared concerns to make a "Britain"'.[47] It was only in a recent interview in which he reached the conclusion that Britishness does not offer a paradigm for the reading of contemporary Scottish literature,[48] but I suggest that his earlier work mirrors the same conviction.

In the tradition of pastoral verse the criticism of urban living is implicitly present in the praise of withdrawn country life. In 'Broughty Ferry', though, Dunn specifically describes the discrepancy between the country and the city: in the urban environment we may witness 'suffering's low comedy' as opposed to the 'Elysian' and 'fairyland' world of the garden (*N*, 25; 24). He prefers the 'stunned perfection' of the natural scene even if it is 'remote,/ Depopulated and complacent' (*N*, 25). For him, living in the country functions as a form of inner emigration (in the metaphorical sense of the term), while of course he remains keenly aware of social problems: 'I won't disfigure loveliness I see/ With an avoidance of its politics' (*N*, 25). The rural-metropolitan polemic goes on in the subsequent 'Here and There',

[44] O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse*, 72.
[45] Dósa, 'A Different Drummer', 30.
[46] O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil', 13.
[47] O'Donoghue, 'An Interview with Douglas Dunn', 46.
[48] Dósa, 'A Different Drummer', 30.

which is one of the programmatic poems of the book. Most of all, the poem serves to justify Dunn's convictions against an imaginary speech partner. Eventually, it nearly turns into an apology, in a way that may remind us of his defensive manner in 'Remembering Lunch'. 'Here and There' has a loose iambic beat with alternating rhymes, evoking not only the natural rhythm of speech, but also the reciprocity of dialogic exchange. What Crawford describes as Dunn's 'ironic self-awareness'[49] in the poem may be the consequence of the Bakhtinian phenomenon, 'the inner dialogicality of language'. In Bakhtin's opinion, not only is every utterance addressed to someone, it also 'provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction'.[50] If in 'Remembering Lunch' and in some pieces of 'Barbarian Pastorals' we encounter flashes of the event called by Bakhtin 'hidden polemic', in 'Here and There' the anticipated, imagined, 'alien' voice of the other not simply penetrates the speaker's consciousness, but the voice itself is also represented in the form of an argument. This dramatisation of the polemic is a bold experiment in the context of lyric poetry but it certainly works in Dunn's poem, perhaps because, as O'Brien notes, the 'devil seems to be getting the best tunes'.[51]

The question behind the internal debate of 'Here and There' may be reconstructed as: what effects does living far from metropolitan centres have on poetry? Dunn describes the background of the poem in his essay 'A Poet's Place':

> several literary friends in England [...] thought I was giving myself away to indulging in a large-scale act of geographical sentimentality. Their opinion seemed to me the result of a reflex impaired by ignorance of Scotland and Scottish writing. It is a reflex that works in concert with metropolitan notions of how to grade centrality and provincialism. [...] Parochialism continues to thrive in the Scottish mentality, and it would be a mistake to believe that it does not embrace art and politics. Surrendering to it [...] results in stage

[49] Crawford, 'Secret Villager', 116.
[50] Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', 279.
[51] O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse*, 78.

> Scottishness and performances of native indignation and indigenous flattery.[52]

Its epigraph from Woody Allen ('Everybody's got to be somewhere') suggests that 'Here and There' may be regarded synoptically with Dunn's 1984 essay 'Provincialism', which starts off with the same indisputable verity.[53] Apparently, Dunn approves of Thomas Hardy's position in his famous controversy over provincialism with Matthew Arnold. He also cites Hardy's opinion on provincialism in his review of *The Literature of Region and Nation*, and, in a linguistic context, he argues that 'Arnold's unconscious subtraction from individuality participated [...] in the superstructure of thought that isolated and weakened Scots and Gaelic'.[54] Hardy disputed Arnold's critical prescriptivism and short-sighted cultural centralism when he wrote, 'A certain provincialism of feeling is invaluable'.[55] Dunn suggests that with the phrase 'provincialism of feeling' Hardy probably referred to what we now term 'a sense of place', or, he adds, 'he may have intended that eccentricity or unexpectedness of feeling which makes a lyric sing'.[56] The regional lyric of *Northlight* shows an undeniable affinity with this 'eccentricity'.

On various platforms, the debate goes on. Dunn gave voice to his resentment at being termed a 'provincial' instead of a 'Scottish' poet in Motion and Morrison's introduction to the *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*.[57] Apart from Heaney's 'An Open Letter', which soon followed the publication of that anthology, Dunn's statement is another illuminating symptom of the psychological tension

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[52] Douglas Dunn, 'A Poet's Place', *Glasgow Herald*, 16 January 1988, p. 7.
[53] Douglas Dunn, 'Provincialism', *Nucleus*, 38.8 (1984), 18.
[54] Douglas Dunn, 'Combating the climate' [a review of *The Literature of Region and Nation*, ed. by R. P. Draper], *Glasgow Herald (Weekender)*, 3 June 1989, p. 20.
[55] Florence Emily Hardy, *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891* (London: Macmillan, 1928), 189. Cited in: Robert Crawford, 'MacDiarmid and English Identity', in *The Literature of Place*, ed. by Norman Page and Peter Preston (London: Macmillan, 1983), 132-55 (p. 139).
[56] Dunn, 'Provincialism', 18.
[57] O'Donoghue, 'An Interview with Douglas Dunn', 50.

beneath, given that the actual word to which he referred never occurs in Motion and Morrison's text. But the way the two anthologists aim to (re)construct a 'British' literary context, with Northern Irish poetry (Heaney, Mahon, Longley, Paulin and others) as its distinguished outpost, clearly gives away their centralist position. Despite the anti-imperialist and distinctively Scottish voice of some of the poems they include from Dunn ('Empires', 'Remembering Lunch' and 'St Kilda's Parliament'), Motion and Morrison make an attempt to expropriate him for the English literary establishment when they say:

> So impressive is recent Northern Irish poetry [...] that it is not surprising to find discussions of English poetry so often having to take place in its shadow. [...] But just as Auden and others rescued the reputation of English poetry in the 1930s, so in the 1970s and 80s a new generation of poets has started to do the same. Two key figures are Douglas Dunn and Tony Harrison.[58]

Here they seem to use 'English' as a term of geography and nationality (as opposed to Northern Irish), since all the poets sampled share the same language (English), except that they use it with their own various accents. Norman Page reminds us that the English language has become a 'lingua franca reflecting to only a limited extent the speech habits of its users'.[59] If, as Page suggests, this common tongue has been the battlefield for 'cultural contact and collision',[60] we need to remember that it was also, and sometimes still is, a major device of cultural imperialism, and of the imposition of authority on 'peripheries'. Draper notes that the derogatory sense of 'provincial' is probably due to its 'hierarchically subordinate implications', suggesting instead the term 'regional' for the benefit of a neutrally descriptive critical

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[58] Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion, 'Introduction', in *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, ed. by Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion (London: Penguin, 1982), 11-20 (p. 16).
[59] Norman Page, 'Introduction', in *The Literature of Place*, ed. by Norman Page and Peter Preston (London: Macmillan, 1983), xi-xii (p. xii).
[60] Ibid.

discourse – not only because it sounds more non-partisan, but also because it implies 'a division of a larger unit, but without the larger being necessarily dominant'.[61] Crawford sets out to problematise the relationship between modern literatures in English and the presumed authority of the London-Oxbridge triangle, and in an attempt to challenge such authority, he aims to 'valorize' that normally disparaging classification 'provincial'.[62] However, in his further investigation of the literary strategies used to respond to, or at times to accommodate, the cultural dominance of the centre, in *Identifying Poets* Crawford uses the term 'identifying poet' to distinguish those (paradigmatic) writers who are concerned with the identity of a place. He argues that the 'phrase "identifying poet" has about it none of the covert cultural imperialism that too easily attends words like "regional", "provincial", or even "national", all of which can be used in implicit marginalization or relegation, when defined against assumed metropolitan norms'.[63]

Although the recent critical response to centralism has helped to create, without doubt, a healthier literary milieu, such identity-conscious theorising seldom infiltrates good poetry. But it still remains an issue that cannot be avoided in the discussion of much of contemporary writing. 'This whole "cosmopolitan" thing and the idea of poetry at the margins somehow being at the centre and so on: that, as we know, is invented by people declaring it is so', Heaney said in an interview. [64] The celebrated 'peripheral' poet adds: 'But I myself, I still feel I'm very much in Ireland'.[65] Dunn has also said that he likes to side-step categorisation: 'Perhaps a better tactic on my part would have been to try and make "provincial" into a term of

[61] Draper, 'Introduction', 4.
[62] Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, 9.
[63] Crawford, *Identifying Poets*, 142.
[64] Clive Wilmer, 'Seamus Heaney' [an interview], in *Poets Talking* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), 77-82 (p. 82).
[65] Ibid.

praise [...] but, being irritated, I just dismissed the word'.[66] Being irritated by the subject of provincialism and the theorising of regional identity, however, does not restrain Dunn from expressing his affiliation with the 'provinces' in very explicit terms both in his essay 'Provincialism' and in the poem 'Here and There'. In 'Provincialism', Dunn poses the question: 'Could it be that the values of England – Westminster, the Monarchy, the Imperial idea, the Conservative Party – have become provincial?'.[67] The interrogative mode transforms into the affirmative in 'Here and There':

> Your Englishness
> Misleads you into Albionic pride,
> Westminstered mockery and prejudice –
> *You're* the provincial, an undignified
> Anachronism.
> (*N*, 28-29)

Dunn discredits Modernism when suggesting that the trend 'may have insinuated into literature too immediate a leap into the universal and neglected the truth of place as a consequence'.[68] His opinion is worth quoting here, because defenders of the paradigmatic nature of provincial (or regional, or identifying) writing tend to use the universality of the local as their chief argument. Draper writes, 'it is still true to say that [...] "the local is the universal"'.[69] The same idea lies behind Crawford's interpretation of 'Here and There' when he argues that Tayport is 'asserted as having its own integrity and significance in a scale which transcends the

[66] Crawford, 'Douglas Dunn Talking with Robert Crawford', 32.
[67] Dunn, 'Provincialism', 18.
[68] Ibid.
[69] R. P. Draper, 'Region Today: Some Reflections on Geoffrey Hill, D. H. Lawrence and Regional Tone', in *The Literature of Place*, ed. by Norman Page and Peter Preston (London: Macmillan, 1983), 1-14 (p. 10).

divisions between metropolitan and provincial'.[70] Crawford's view can be valid in a spiritual context, but not necessarily in a socio-political or geographical sense. In his preface to *Poetry in the British Isles: Non-metropolitan Perspectives*, Christopher Harvie poses the question whether regional culture is a 'refuge', and suggests that in Britain 'the regional is conscious, controversial and unpredictable, aware that its lyricism may get stuck on the emotional level, lacking the verifications needed for rational politics'.[71] Dunn clearly knows both the advantages and the drawbacks of what his small-town identity entails – '"*You've literature and a career to lose*"' (*N*, 27) –, and would not transgress the above mentioned division only to 'avoid the politics' of this position. He points out the political responsibility of localism when he suggests in an interview that provincialism is 'a gesture made to prevent ugly changes happening before benevolent reforms have had a chance to be introduced'.[72] His praise of the 'east-coast weather' in 'Here and There' (*N*, 26) is at least as much the consequence of a calculated decision as a temperamental thing. 'From the perspective of literature,' Dunn says, 'it's a commonplace view that you have to be local before you can succeed in being universal'.[73] Although it is a recent opinion, I think it is legitimate to relate it to the standards of *Northlight*. Dunn aims to find the particular meaning of his chosen ground rather than to assert the universal relevance of the local in 'Here and There', and expresses the importance of exclusive affinity to place: 'It matters where you cast your only shadow' (*N*, 27).

Dunn analysed the historical, social and economic determinants of the relationship between regions and a larger unity in *Europa's Lover*. Edwin Morgan

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[70] Crawford, *Identifying Poets*, 303.
[71] Christopher Harvie, '"My country will not yield you any sanctuary": A polemic by way of preface', in *Poetry in the British Isles: Non-metropolitan Perspectives*, ed. by Hans-Werner Ludwig and Lothar Fietz (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), 1-12 (p. 5).
[72] Goff, 'Douglas Dunn: An Interview', 12.
[73] Dósa, 'A Different Drummer', 31.

imagines the same relationship as a linear course, and tends to use the metaphor of a voyage in time or space, as in *From Glasgow to Saturn* or *Sonnets from Scotland.* Although the time travel theme is introduced in Dunn's poem about Europe as part of the visionary representation, the various allegiances tend to be present simultaneously, in the form of multiple identities, without having to embark on a spatial journey to reach either. The above quoted lines from 'Daylight' ('pure partnership/ Here makes with there and everywhere/ Between life, death and forever') also seem to refer to this (ideally) participatory relationship, which is spatial and temporal at the same time. But when in an echo of Harrison's famous 'Newcastle is Peru', in 'Here and There' Dunn claims that 'Tayport is Trebizond' (*N*, 26), it is to emphasise that the local and the particular should always precede the universal and the general in order to retain its integrity, while his vocabulary also fits in the marriage theme of the book:

> fidelity directs
> Love to its place, the eye to what it sees
> And who we live with, and the *whys* and *whens*
> That follow *ifs* and *buts*.
> (*N*, 27)

In the context of resisting cultural centralism, Herbert's observation about a coincidence between Dunn's 'cultural relocation' and 'a sense of deepening independence from both English and Scottish overviews of what constitutes a "British" literature' may be elucidating.[74] But in creative terms the affinity with the place expressed in these lines seems to justify Draper's opinion, according to which influences of the local environment and community may be 'potential sources of

[74] W. N. Herbert, 'Dunn and Dundee', 135.

authenticity and strength'.[75] It is still possible to set up a context in which we may argue for the universality of the local, but only with a spiritual rather than a historical or socio-cultural frame of reference in mind, as the universality of the local may stem from the similarity of human experience. Finally in this context, Sean O'Brien's supposition that an unacknowledged debate is going on 'between the general and the particular' in 'Here and There' should be mentioned.[76] If the protagonist in the poem takes the side of the particular, it would be pretentious to assert that the voice of the metropolitan opponent in the debate could represent the universal.

In *Northlight* Dunn's imagination reaches out to far-off places from the clear-cut locality of North-East Fife: to Australia in 'Dieback' and 'In-flight Entertainment', and to Africa in 'The War in the Congo'. But, unlike *Europa's Lover*, these poems do not establish a partnership between the homeland and the world. Here Dunn's viewpoint is not that of the cosmopolitan, but rather he investigates the predicament of the *Ausländer* in various surroundings. He held the position of writer-in-residence at the University of New England in Australia for a term in 1984, which inspired the two Australian poems collected in *Northlight*. He describes himself as stranger to the land in linguistic terms in 'Dieback', as someone with no vocabulary by which to call its birds. Recalling the stylistic apparatus used in *Europa's Lover*, 'In-flight Entertainment' recaptures the mood of the journey home from down under: a surrealistic, dreamy roaming over historical eras and 'half of geography' (*N*, 60). In contrast with the exotic, even bizarre, foreign panorama seen from the panoptic view of an air-passenger, on arrival to Britain, London is regarded in an atmosphere of familiar domesticity from above: 'Westminster foggy and Big

[75] Draper, 'Introduction', 9.
[76] O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse*, 78.

Ben at seven' (*N*, 60). Even so, the poem draws to an impatient conclusion, emblematic of Dunn's narrower, northern identity:

> Change terminals, change planes, process the bags,
> This London never could be north enough
> For me.
> (*N*, 60)

The following piece that takes emigration for its subject matter, 'The Departures of Friends in Childhood', gives another example of his conviction that the subject of geographical loyalty cannot be altered without having to give up one's relationship with the past. The short story-like 'The War in the Congo' tells about the fantastic journey of a stamp from a cut-off hand in a deserted African village into a young Irish philatelist's album, a theme which he later repeats and develops further in 'Pushkin's Ring' in *The Year's Afternoon.* As a conceptual analogy to the situation of the émigrés in 'Dieback', that 'innocent know-nothing' stamp illustrates again that having been torn out of one's spatial context necessarily leads to being an outcast in temporality, or 'lonesome in history' (*N*, 51).

Dunn investigates the predicament of the visitor in more abstract terms in 'A House in the Country'. With a lyrical situation recalling both Larkin's 'Church-going' and Mahon's 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford', the poem records a lonely visit to a deserted house where 'Webs lace the narrow hall' and 'Floorboards protest/ At the weight of my shadow' (*N*, 38). Dunn stresses in the poem's first line that the setting is not Scotland, his native land. The speaker's situation symbolises that when one is unable to initiate a meaningful dialogue with a place and its past, temporal continuity will lose its significance for one's relationship with either smaller or larger communities:

*I am nowhere, everywhere and past*
*In a house in a country I do not know*
*A stone clock on the mantel grinds to dust*
*Minutes that were lifetimes long ago.*
(*N*, 40)

The opening poems of the book illustrated that the comprehension of, and a deeply rooted identification with, the past and the natural environment of a particular area is essential for developing solidarity with one's neighbours and fellow citizens, and, in Renan's terms, for engendering 'the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form'. The hermeneutic dialogue with the possible signification of one's narrower home, thus, leads to the formation of national identities by way of a metonymical extension of that meaning.

It is possible to make a connection between Dunn's worldview in *Northlight* and Anderson's hypothesis about the making of national consciousness, according to which 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact [...] are imagined'.[77] At the same time, Dunn's concept of temporality opens a metaphysical window in our modern interpretation of the nation as being the exclusive result of secular imagination. In contrast with earlier notions of simultaneity along a Christian chronology marked out by Creation and Judgement Day at its opposite ends, as Anderson says, our view of nationality relies on a more recent apprehension of time in which simultaneity is 'transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar'.[78] In *Northlight*, Dunn exploits the in-between position between this synthetic time calculated against the concurrence of other secular events (which is the site of

[77] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.
[78] Ibid., 24.

historiography, the focus of his earlier interest) and a more archaic and authentic apprehension of time in which familiar places and the past may inform us about the significance of the present. Later he makes references to the irony latently present in artificially marked chronology in 'Turn Over a New Leaf' in *Dante's Drum-kit*. Although attentiveness to temporal and spatial intersections remains an obvious resource of that book's lyricism, the metaphoric apprehension of time in relation to the landscape is really pregnant in *Northlight*, as Dunn's description in prose of his own attitude to landscape and environment reveals:

> Perhaps the best library for a poet is the one that exists outdoors. It is consulted with all five senses as you read the book of place and try to understand its signs and visible dialects, its hundreds of names. *When you do this, you find yourself alive in more time than the one marked on your wristwatch*, which is just a device for calculating forgetfulness.[79]

The metaphysical perspective on time in Dunn's lyricism allows of a more liberated and more complex view of temporality when national identity is concerned than the calendrical simultaneity put forward in Anderson's theory. Anderson borrows the idea of 'homogeneous, empty time' from Walter Benjamin, who distinguishes it from 'Messianic time', in which the simultaneity of past and future occurs in the present tense. Benjamin suggests:

> Historicism contends itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a causa is for that very reason historical. [...] A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the "time of the now", which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.[80]

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[79] Dunn, '*Northlight*...', 3. Emphasis added.
[80] Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', 263.

As pointed out, Dunn ascribes a similar prominence to the present moment, which is pregnant with the incompleteness of the past and the promise of the future, in 'The People Before' and 'Memory and Imagination'. In his *Imagined Communities*, Anderson provides another definition, from Auerbach, for what Benjamin means by 'Messianic time': 'the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is *simultaneously* something which has always been, and will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, is something eternal, something omnitemporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly event'.[81] It is common between this theological standpoint and Dunn's lyricism that they represent the present moment as *both* itself *and* something else. Certainly, we cannot talk of religious motivation in this instance of Dunn's transgressing secular apprehensions of time. Moreover, as mentioned before, he does not attribute a teleological purpose to historical development, which is otherwise a fundamental assumption in Christian views of temporal linearity. The logical consequence of the potentially metaphysical, and thus open-ended, representative quality of the present for Dunn's invention of the nation is that nationality will become the subject of an endless semantic negotiation. He has been criticised for what seems to be on the surface the idealisation of close-knit rural communities and for paying less attention to the social make-up of those communities. It is a fact that vanishing ways of life have assumed an elegiac constitution in a number of his poems and some of his short stories, but the above proposed interpretation of 'in-betweenness' in *Northlight* as an epistemological strategy that enables both the identity construction of the present tense and its constant deferral to an indefinite future should be instructive of his

[81] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 24.

ideological openness to a pluralist and future-oriented society. It may be elucidating to read Dunn's words from this angle: 'In my mind, the better community is in the future'.[82]

The ontology of being a visitor leads on to the final point: the concept of inner emigration. The notion emerges in the metropolitan friend's argument in 'Here and There':

> '*An inner émigré, you'll versify,*
> *Not write. You'll turn your back on history.*'
> (*N*, 27)

We may also find the term in Dunn's 1994 essay 'Writing Things Down', and a related term, 'internal exile', emerges in 'Sketches' and 'Moorlander' in *Dante's Drum-kit* and in 'Out of Breath' in *The Year's Afternoon*. Although *Northlight* precedes the publication of that essay by six years, I touch upon the idea of inner emigration at this point, because it ties in with the themes presented in Dunn's 1988 collection very closely, and may also prepare the understanding of his poetry in the 1990s. In 'Writing Things Down' Dunn has recourse to a term Günter Grass uses, 'rootless cosmopolitan', to describe the 'eclectic' as well as introvert, identity-conscious scene of contemporary literature not just in Scotland, but more generally in the British Isles:

> By the 1990s, "rootless" can look like a lie as much as the truth. It is a question of perspective, and British critics, Scottish ones especially, are not good at answering it. [...] "Rootless cosmopolitan" is a true description of how we have come to be, but only because we have allowed it to happen. It is a bit like another fashionable phrase – "internal émigré", or what it describes, the condition of being an "inner exile". [...] Rootlessness and self-imposed "inner" exile are clearly undesirable positions in which to find yourself. It is

[82] Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 29.

> hard to see them as physical or actual; they describe states of mind encouraged by the condition of poetry in Western societies. (*WTD*, 89)

'Inner emigration' is a frequently used literary term with an extensive network of cultural references. In English literary criticism, the term probably gained a renewed currency from Seamus Heaney's poem 'Exposure':

> I am neither internee nor informer;
> An 'inner émigré', grown long-haired
> And thoughtful; a wood-kerne
>
> Escaped from the massacre,
> Taking protective colouring
> From bole and bark, feeling
> Every wind that blows;
>
> Who, blowing up these sparks
> For their meagre heat, have missed
> The once-in-a-lifetime portent,
> The comet's pulsing rose.[83]

Heaney suggests that the phrase 'inner émigré' refers to 'an ideal situation, [in which] you're like a goalkeeper waiting for the world to fire balls at you, and you see things more urgently and clearly'.[84] He uses the phrase in a geographical sense, as he wrote the poem after his 1972 move from Belfast in Northern Ireland to Wicklow in the Irish Republic. But the irony is political: he deliberately ignores the political division of his home island when denoting his relocation from Ulster to Eire as 'internal'. At the same time, the Irish poet defines his move as 'emigration', since his change of address is, of course, a profoundly political statement, or, seen from the reader's perspective, an alarming symptom of a hopeless situation. Morrison and

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[83] Seamus Heaney, 'Exposure', in *New Selected Poems: 1966-1987* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 90-91 (p 91).
[84] John Haffenden, 'Seamus Heaney', in *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 57-75 (p. 71).

Motion pick up the expression from Heaney, but employ it in a different, exclusively technical, sense. In their introduction to *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, the two English anthologists describe their chosen poets, and by implication themselves, as inner émigrés: 'not inhabitants of their own lives so much as intrigued observers, not victims but onlookers, not poets working in a confessional white heat but dramatists and story-tellers'.[85] Perhaps as a wilful act of misreading Heaney's poem, they take his phrase as betokening the lacuna between experience and representation, which typically results in a dramatic or narrative style of writing as an alternative of lyric poetry.

Another Northern Irish-born poet, Derek Mahon writes about emigration in the same political and geographical context as Heaney in 'Afterlives':

> Perhaps if I'd stayed behind
> And lived it bomb by bomb
> I might have grown up at last
> And learnt what is meant by home.[86]

Mahon's poem records his reflections during a visit to Belfast after five years of absence, focusing on a lyrical situation which magnifies the contrast between enduring allegiance and becoming a stranger to one's own land. Both Mahon and Heaney refer nostalgically to the pressures of commitment in time of political turbulence and to the intensity of the experience, the 'comet's pulsing rose'. The vocabulary Heaney uses in his devising an aesthetic standpoint out of the outcast's predicament refers back to the work of Ovid. The Latin lyric poet is the first inner exile (in the geographical sense of the term) recorded in literary history. He was

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[85] Morrison and Motion, 'Introduction', 12.
[86] Derek Mahon, 'Afterlives', in *Poems 1962-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 57-58 (p. 58).

banished by Emperor Augustus to Tomi, a barbarised Greek colony by the Black Sea but still within the confines of the Roman Empire, where he recorded his laments in *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*. Surely, Heaney cannot feel conscious of being on the cultural periphery in Dublin, where he now lives and works, and another relevant difference may be located between the Irish poet's deeply felt conflict over direct political engagement and what may seem escapism, his 'responsible *tristia*',[87] and the mostly personal grounds (indiscretion and licentiousness) on which the Latin poet was expelled from Rome, and which are explained in his *Tristia*.[88] An informative parallel may be drawn between Ovid's predicament and the sense in which the term, inner émigré, is used by the metropolitan opponent in 'Here and There'. Voicing an obsolete Arnoldian centralism, his friend warns Dunn's poet-persona that, although staying within the country, his self-imposed exile to 'Grey northland' (*N*, 27) may result in his losing contact with the assumed heart of British culture. The predicament of the exile as a force of inspiration has a long history in Dunn's work. He notes in an early article that Hull's 'remoteness' appealed to him when he was living there. He imagined the city as 'a veritable Tomi', where the 'unacknowledged Ovids [were] scribbling away by firelight while the world raged outside like the Getes'.[89]

In 'Writing Things Down' Dunn uses 'inner émigré' as a synonym of 'inner exile' (*WTD*, 89). He derives the latter phrase from post-revolutionary Russian politics, where it was used to refer to the fact that it was sufficient to banish a *persona non grata* to Siberia, which was remote enough, but still within the borders

[87] Heaney, 'Exposure', 90.
[88] Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso), *Sorrows of an Exile: Tristia*, trans. by A. D. Melville, with an introduction and notes by E. J. Kenney (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
[89] Douglas Dunn, 'In the City of H.' [a review of *A History of the County of York, East Riding*, vol. I: *The City of Kingston upon Hull*, ed. by K. J. Allison], *New Statesman*, 23 January 1970, p. 124.

of the country. In his review of *Poets from Northern Ireland*, he refers to the origins of the concept in Nazi Germany and its contemporary use in Northern Irish literature as well as in Eastern Europe: 'Cunning, and "interior exile" – the idea is used by Heaney, but was invented by German writers under Nazi rule, and applied against them as an excuse; it is also used in East European countries – are clearly being employed'.[90] Here Dunn echoes the words of Joyce's character Stephen Dedalus. But, as distinct from the phrase 'inner exile', 'inner emigration' is a literary term that originates in pre-Second World War Germany. It may be informative to take a brief look at its use in German criticism, because, rather than relying on the Russian context offered in 'Writing Things Down', it arguably guides us to a more complex as well as subtle interpretive horizon against which to measure the émigré's predicament in not only Dunn, but also in other English-language poets.

Ralf Schnell points out that, in absence of a categorical definition, the term '*innere Emigration*' is subject to a wide range of interpretations, and provides a sketch of its historical evolution. The idea probably emerges in the diary of Jochen Klepper, who was to commit suicide together with his Jewish wife and stepdaughter in 1942, and who, in 1933, made notes of his 'emigrant's mood', his 'spiritual exile', and his existence of being an emigrant despite staying at home. A year before his death in 1938, the poet-sculptor Ernst Barlach complained at being 'a kind of émigré' in his Fatherland, also maintaining that his situation was 'worse than that of a factual emigrant'. In his 1938 speech 'This Peace', Thomas Mann, himself soon to emigrate to the United States, makes a distinction between 'the Germans of the inner and the outer emigration', to be understood in the context of a literary opposition '*extra et intra muros*'. In his 1938 review of Hans Fallada's *Wolf Among Wolves*,

[90] Douglas Dunn, 'Belonging' [a review of *Poets from Norhtern Ireland*, ed. by Frank Ormsby], *The Honest Ulsterman*, 64 (1980), 85-89 (p. 88).

published in the émigré journal *Das Wort* in Moscow, Kurt Kersten estimated Fallada's popular writing 'an attempt to take refuge by someone who chooses neither to be an oppressor, nor to belong to the "inner emigration"'. Klauss Mann speaks of the 'homeless in their homeland', who are 'named "the inner emigration"', in his 1939 novel *The Volcano*. The list of the examples one could bring is too long to continue here, but even these few may illustrate that, although they held much in common, the political and spiritual motivations of the inner émigrés and the exiles or emigrants were not identical. But, as Schnell argues, it was the similarities between their existential situations that, for those concerned, justified borrowing the image of the exile to illustrate their own predicament. Isolation, alienation, material and intellectual threat characterised the experience of the inner émigrés. Shortly, *innere Emigration* may be described as a form of political introvertism on the part of unassimilated intellectuals under the National Socialist regime between 1933-1945 as opposed to literary inwardness.[91]

Dunn is aware that it may seem awkward or melodramatic to apply this terminology to the literature of Scotland, which has a relatively long uninterrupted history of democratic government when he says, 'No British secret policeman has escorted a single living Scottish writer to the docks, airport, railway station or a barbed-wire frontier post. Any presentation of one-way passports that has gone on has been in the head, and to that extent gestural and unreal'.[92] He also adds, 'Were Scotland a real country, and realized in its political and cultural identity, instead of inconveniently half-formed [...], this question of nationality and exile would be clearer'.[93] Still, though not intent on proposing a categorical definition of Dunn's use

[91] Ralf Schnell, *Literarische Innere Emigration 1933-1945* (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung und Carl Ernst Verlag, 1976), 2-9.
[92] Douglas Dunn, 'Exile and Unexile', *Cencrastus*, 16 (1984), 4-6 (p. 4).
[93] Ibid.

of 'inner émigré', we may reasonably establish some points of analogy between his idea of exile and the examples from German literary history. In both these cases, as we have seen, inner emigration is a situation into which one is 'forced', and is a 'clearly undesirable' predicament. Inner emigration often materialises as a mood of lyrical inwardness in Dunn's poetry, and motivates his solitary walks, which find a correlation in Politovsky's 'inner wanderlust' in *The Donkey's Ears*. It may also assume the form of political resistance, which leads to Dunn's anti-Poll Tax pamphlet. Importantly, as 'a state of mind', it is also related to the lyrical subject's alienation from society, to which Dunn gives a shape in his later pastoral verse: 'a degree of alienation is inevitable in most contemporary writers, if only because the nature of art and poetry estranges its makers and believers from the nature of contemporary societies. To that extent we are all "inner émigrés"'.[94] In general, then, 'inner emigration' may refer to the absence of the poet's ability or willingness to identify with the social and political actuality of a larger community. I shall return to this disenchantment with public commitment and its implications for the lyrical poet in the following chapter.

In the younger generation of the Scottish poets, John Burnside and Carol Ann Duffy have also written on this subject. But, more importantly in the present context, Ron Butlin gives a lyrical synopsis of the predicament of the exile (in terms that are different from the politically motivated dilemmas of Heaney or Mahon) in his 'Claiming My Inheritance', which Dunn included in his Faber anthology:

> the fence I stood beside became a wooden thing,
> the gate was iron-lengths – heated, hammered, bent
> and riveted in place years earlier. I leant
> against it. I struck it, but could not animate the dead
> place to suffer for me. Instead,

[94] Ibid., 6.

> the emptiness that stained
> the empty sky above me blue,
> gave definition to
> my isolation.
> Only this completed world remained.
>
> The older I become the more
> I am aware of exile, of longing for –
>
> I clench my fist on nothing and hold on.[95]

Butlin's poem exhibits the same keywords as Schnell's above definition (isolation, exile and alienation) in its projecting the situation of the exile onto the experience of self-estrangement. Butlin also supplements the context of inner emigration as being a psychological disposition with the more tangible context of linguistic alienation: 'I take especial care/ no accent lapse'.[96] The absence of a linguistic solidarity is a major cause which leads Dunn to consider the predicament of modern poets in terms of their 'rootlessness':

> At this late stage it might seem like the height of impertinence [...] to lament the weakening of the Scots language as a consequence of the political Union of 1707 [...]. Yet the diminishment of the Scots language happened, too, as did the modification of speech which has tended to replace it with accent and the residue of dialect. "The classics can console, but not enough" – Walcott's line is fascinating. It leads me to believe that by this last decade of the twentieth century we are all "rootless cosmopolitans". We are people for whom civilised standards of literature are not enough. (*WTD*, 88-89)

Butlin's poem may better serve us as an illustration of inner emigration in the context of hermeneutic dialogues with the identity of a place in Dunn's poetry. The condition of being a visitor is a concept that may be closely associated with the

[95] Ron Butlin, 'Claiming My Inheritance', in *Ragtime in Unfamiliar Bars* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985), 44-45 (p. 45).
[96] Ibid., 44.

experience of the inner émigré in Dunn. Even the function of inner emigration as a metaphor of this condition could be reasonably contended. As pointed out in 'Dieback' and 'A House in the Country', the predicament of the visitor is characterised by an inability to initiate meaningful dialogues with a place, either for linguistic reasons or because the visitor's displacement results in losing contact with the past. In this process of isolation, the land becomes a vacant space that defies cognition: 'I clench my fist on nothing', Butlin writes. If earlier Dunn laid great emphasis on defending retrospective idealisation as a verifiable and viable procedure in 'Fixed', now in 'Maggie's Corner', which records a visit to his native parish, Inchinnan, he states the opposite:

> Here, everywhere, forethought and afterthought,
> Nowhere and nothing's what I think I see,
>
> Or what I thought I thought, or saw, no if
> Or but about it, just the world I'm in.
> (*N*, 54)

These lines may be read as referring to the poet's inability to identify with a place, or when in the poet's mind the place resists to become the subject of an open-ended hermeneutic inquiry, to use a Jaussian terminology. In Butlin's words, 'Only this completed world remained'. Jauss classifies this instance of semantic closure as 'monologic truth', which 'leaves nothing for the receiver but the role of contemplative understanding'.[97] Such forms of alienation, then, deny the identifying poet the lyrical horizon against which he or she may measure the material and

[97] Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 213.

temporal properties of a place. Dunn illustrates this condition in these philosophical lines from 'A House in the Country':

> 'Reality's the ghost
> Stalking your privacy and footsteps
> With minstrelsies. Your innermost
> Identity eavesdrops
>
> 'On what it does and where it goes with you
> Among the flowers and clocks, perfidy, faith,
> The groves of rooms that utter you
> Beyond the physical and into death.'
> (*N*, 40)

In general terms, by achieving a synthesis of the nature lyric and the local history of North-East Fife, Dunn potentially secures the diachronic continuity of the identities of its inhabitants. In poems like 'At Falkland Palace', 'Going to Aberlemno' or 'Memory and Imagination' he extends metonymically this local identity to include perceptions of Scottishness. He supports traditional interpretations of the concept of 'nation', like the one proposed by Renan, who says that the feeling of solidarity plays probably the most important part in what constitutes a nation. Dunn's emotionally motivated view of nationality (his feeling of solidarity with a place and a people) strongly underwrites his general attitude of an essentially lyrical poet. He makes an attempt to provide the place with a historically situated identity in timeless or aesthetic terms when in an imaginative sense he explores the hiatus between linear (calendrical) and cyclic (metaphorical and Christian) representations of temporality. While this hermeneutic standpoint anticipates an infinitely changing and kaleidoscopic identity, Dunn's botanical sensibility, and his deeply felt fidelity to the local landscape and the natural environment provide for a fixed entity in the fluidity of the interpretive process. In *Northlight* he confirms that being a visitor or

an 'inner émigré' is a disagreeable condition for a poet, because, due to an inability to (re)establish contact with the history of a place, he or she will face the completed, but not consummated, simultaneity of the 'Swiss seconds' of a calendrical continuity, which, in poetic terms, is not oriented towards fulfilment. On the whole, Dunn's poetry in the second half of the 1980s gives a clear proof that it is only the unfinished moment, which is representative of something beyond itself, that may turn into a productive site of 'in-betweenness', that is into an interpretive position in which the poet may launch a pluralistic and open-ended dialogue with the landscape and what it embraces: its past, its future, its spirit and its people.

# Chapter Five

# Beating the Drums

### The politics of self-defence in *Dante's Drum-kit*

Dunn was appointed Professor of English Literature at St Andrews in 1991, which 'added a university to his estuarial republic', as W. N. Herbert writes,[1] and also furnished him with a cultural authority as well as a financial security he had not had at his disposal earlier as a free-lance writer. He was Head of the School of English at St Andrews University for five years in the 1990s, and is currently Director of the St Andrews Scottish Studies Institute. *Reading Douglas Dunn*, a *Festschrift* disguised as a critical monograph, was published for the poet's fiftieth birthday in 1992. The 1993 volume *Dante's Drum-kit* can be seen as a mid-life stock-taking, which on the poetic side counterbalances his public review of Scottish culture in the three anthologies that followed each other with great rapidity: *Scotland: An Anthology* (1991), *The Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry* (1992) and *The Oxford Book of Scottish Short Stories* (1995). In this chapter I look at the ways in which Dunn's perceptions of the individual's place in history and Scotland's place in the Union with England evolve further in *Dante's Drum-kit* (with special attention to his work as an anthologist, critic and pamphleteer), and the new poetic and ideological dilemmas it will lead to in the late nineties.

In *Dante's Drum-kit* Dunn breaks down and polarises in an apparently irreversible way the metaphysical synthesis of time which he created out of the mosaic pieces of history as he presented them in *Europa's Lover*, and which

[1] W. N. Herbert, 'Dunn and Dundee', 136.

depended on the way he projected the aestheticised landscape of Fife onto Scotland's past in *Northlight*. The synthesis of a national past and the natural environment will split up into personal time and historical chronology. Not only does this newly located division appear to be uncompromising for Dunn, but history also puts restrictions on personal time, and so controls individual autonomy. Still, rather than making an attempt to either convert this predicament into a productive tension or resolve it, he preserves this strategic fissure, and in fact it becomes useful for him to mark off the boundaries of his private ground. It leads to a pastoral decadence that culminates in the image of the poet-persona kicking a book in 'Indolence' in *The Year's Afternoon*, even peeing on it in his garden, and only feeling bad because a daisy has been undeservedly drenched, too.

Dunn measures the dimensions of personal time in 'Disenchantments', the central poem whose rhyme scheme (the *terza rima* of Dante's *Divine Comedy*) inspired the book's title. He divests the present tense of its metaphysical perspective in the realm of personal time, and, consequently, the 'already consummated' representativeness with which he provided it in *Northlight*. He retains the idea of eternal recurrence, but deflates it by suggesting that we only live in a perpetually occurring present tense that is available for our five senses. In his essay on MacCaig's poetry, Dunn describes this 'present eternal' as 'a tense in which we live much of the time, but only when we forget politics and history'.[2] In 'Turn Over a New Leaf' he is even cynical about what was earlier seen as the promise of the future in the present moment:

[2] Douglas Dunn, '"As a man sees...": On Norman MacCaig's Poetry', *Verse*, 7.2 (1990), 55-67 (p. 60).

> Time's frantic on the planet and it lives in me and you;
> It is the mother of all maggots and it's caused by what we do.
> (*DDK*, 6)

The eternal present loses its contact with the simultaneity of Messianic time, because, as 'Disenchantments' seems to suggest, that ephemeral unity of appearance and reality, and of experience and reflection, splits up again:

> 'I've got a rendezvous
> To keep with the transfigured commonplace.
>
> It's when we think we see God. Which isn't true.'
> (*DDK*, 33)

Even if with a touch of bitter self-consciousness in him, Dunn defends spirituality in Part III of the poem: 'It happens in the eye and intellect', he says, rather than being an 'occult stasis' or some 'schizo-Christian praxis' (*DDK*, 34). The closing image of a windowpane dribbling with a 'double tear' in Part II, however, leaves us with a sense of finely tuned nostalgia for that lost innocence of seeing. He confronts the existence of private time in the body ('Molecular chronology') and the mind ('psycho-clock') with a synthetic calendrical time in 'Turn Over a New Leaf': 'Time's artificial corner waits where nineteen ninety-nine/ Becomes a bell, a bottle and the lilt of "Auld Lang Syne"' (*DDK*, 7). Remoteness from Messianic time gives rise to irony about calendrical simultaneity (which now does not bear the promise of salvation) in the image of how a 'de-pulsed wrist with its still-kicking wrist-watch/ Presents how life goes clocking ever onward' in 'Disenchantments' (*DDK*, 41). It is the same metaphysical detachment, as well as the separation from history, that deprives private time from its openness to the future: 'Hereafter? No, the here and now' (*DDK*, 34). That private time loses its grip on the future, it can be ascribed to

the poem's retrospective, stock-taking horizon only in part. I am not intent on exploring the full motives behind Dunn's disillusion here. It is enough to say that his disenchantment is related to a gradual change in his worldview which may have been intensified by the experience behind *Elegies*. In *Dante's Drum-kit* memory appears to be of little consequence for him in maintaining continuity between the past and the present. It can just as easily turn to be an illusion, an 'insult to the intelligence' (*DDK*, 32), as it is a credible means of evoking people and things gone long ago. And when the present is but a function of sensory perception, if the continuity of perception is lost, then the continuity of time itself becomes uncertain. The past becomes 'another time' (*DDK*, 33) and we lose contact with our dead. While it seems plausible to relate this problem to the death of his first wife, we have to consider the earlier examples in Dunn for similar metaphoric representations of the recess between different temporal dimensions, for instance in 'Stranger's Grief'. There he suggests that 'Youth's country is impossibly across/ A wide river' where one can never go back (*B*, 51). In a similar way, although he knows that feeling his daughter's 'infant energy' links up with the memory of a close encounter with a petrol can explosion from his own boyhood, he is unable to pinpoint the specific connection between present and past in 'One Thing and Another' (*DDK*, 97). The absence of time's continuity indirectly undermines the coherence of self-identity in 'Disenchantments', when '"who-you-were is walking by your side [...]/ Past-self and present self matching stride for stride"' (*DDK*, 33).

Disillusioned in private time, the last thing Dunn wants to do is idealise any of its dimensions, especially the future. The poem provides another example of metaphysical irony in his poetic work:

Hereafter
Looks like sacred vision; but it's profane –

God's salesmanship, then His religious laughter.
(*DDK*, 32)

Posterity does not promise any good for the poet. Dunn's image of the 'cheeky biographer' leafing through 'Photocopied indiscretions' (*DDK*, 42) may owe a debt to Philip Larkin's similarly vitriolic foreseeing of his own imagined biographer, a Jake Balokowsky, passing a verdict on the poet in 'Posterity': '"I'm stuck with this old fart at least a year"'.[3] If Dunn was not very pleased with the revealing details of Motion's biography of Larkin, then he saw the publication of his letters as desecration.[4] 'Posterity? It's literary sport', he says in 'Disenchantments' (*DDK*, 43). Convinced that a poet's critical afterlife amounts to but an invasion on privacy which has ultimately nothing to do with literature ('Footnoted bottles – *oo-ya*!', *DDK*, 42), he tries to protect himself as well as his poetry against this intrusion in advance:

Don't weary me
With 'reputation', 'text', 'context', or 'fame';
Don't '-ize' or '-ism' me; don't 'theory' me –

The consequence of poetry is shame.
(*DDK*, 43)

This is an odd, revealing statement from a poet who has maintained strong associations with various universities (first as a student and librarian, then Writer-in-

[3] Philip Larkin, 'Posterity', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 170.
[4] Dunn said, 'When I first read the letters, I was very shaken. [...] Larkin was a very reticent individual, and people's private lives are people's private lives, and you just don't pry'. In: William Baer, 'An Interview with Douglas Dunn', *The Formalist: A Journal of Metrical Poetry*, 8.1 (1997), 19-36 (p. 26).

Resident, and eventually as a professor and head of department) throughout his career. Dunn's distrust of criticism and literary education is not a new development. He writes in a 1971 prose piece, 'The universities are beating literature to death with paperback criticism. [...] When today's doomsters put their ears to the ground they don't hear the thundering Hun but hordes of scurrying men with diplomas, racing like mice to a burst bag of grain, "silently and very fast"'.[5] A similar degree of scepticism is registered in 'A Theory of Literary Criticism' in *The Year's Afternoon*, where Dunn dissociates the authentic existence of a literary work from actual criticism.

Dunn's poetry also shows profound scepticism towards institutional religion when life after death is concerned. He does not cherish the idea of passing the next millennium in Dante's hierarchic paradise with 'Christians who *will* have you catalogued' (*DDK*, 40). While he has faith in justice and equality, ironically, he longs for a politically minded though carefully guarded privacy in the life after death: 'make [my paradise] pagan, please, Republican,/ Domestic, set in very private grounds' (*DDK*, 40). At the same time, the sense of spirituality as a possible source of consolation, which so much pervades the world of *Elegies*, is missing. What the reader only finds is fear of death: 'there are days/ When I believe in grey rivers and boatmen// In shabby cloaks' (*DDK*, 40). There is neither a poet's paradise, nor a Christian paradise, nor any form of religious or other idealism, not even a Virgil for a companion, but only a bleak vision of afterlife:

> Mineral loneliness. The hour of stone.
> A boat cut loose. Not much to steer it with.
> Grey branches hanging over Acheron.
> (*DDK*, 46)

[5] Dunn, 'Statement', 107.

Loss of faith in the future and the secularisation of death lead to a devalued view of private time which does not allow of a redemptive Messianic simultaneity based on the rituals of the Christian calendar. Dunn avoids making references to Christian family festivals in the domestic poems of *Dante's Drum-kit*. What he presents instead is an amalgam of pagan rites, gods, goddesses and nymphs, who populate the pastoral world of the garden. Certainly, this pagan imagery, as well as the garden itself, is associated with fertility. 'Garden Hints' pictures the garden as inhabited by children and more significantly by women, who, as we also know from Dunn's short stories,[6] have a degree of fertile intimacy both with cultivated and untamed nature which, he claims, is never really available for men. While to an extent Dunn's pastoral settings sublimate, or at least leave open the possibility of, a future-oriented poetics, it may be argued that the same tactic separates him from the convention of Scottish verse which champions the geological-based and masculine poetry whose status in the twentieth century was reaffirmed in Hugh MacDiarmid's work, especially in 'On a Raised Beach' and 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle' respectively. It is not accidental that Dunn has not dedicated a poem to MacDiarmid yet, and nor is he ever likely to do so.[7] Being conscious of his gesture to pastoral tradition as a form of aesthetic and functional dissidence may be the reason why he has been so keen on establishing the historical grounds for his own vegetational poetics. He fends off charges of dissent by making the indisputable point that 'you

[6] See: '"The sea's really a kind of garden. That's why women look so much better in it than men do. It's no coincidence we have mermaids, and naiads, or that Aphrodite was a woman"'. In: Douglas Dunn, 'Wives in the Garden', in *Secret Villages* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 36-45 (p. 41).
[7] Dunn says, 'What I can't do is surrender my aesthetic convictions [...] to national and political priorities of writing, as MacDiarmid defined them, and thereby allow myself to become a function of MacDiarmid'. In: O'Donoghue, 'An Interview with Douglas Dunn', 49.

can't grow too much on a stone',[8] and in 'The Predicament of Scottish Poetry' he advocates 'Of the Day Estivall' by Alexander Hume from the late sixteenth century and the more recent work of Andrew Young (generously represented in the Faber anthology) as possible foundations for an alternative sensibility. He finds further justification in the technique of Norman MacCaig, who, as Dunn said not long ago, 'taught a whole generation of Scottish people how to see',[9] and in turn links it up with Young's 'use of natural imagery and observation'.[10] Although Dunn probably regards this thematic interest as one that extends the spectrum of Scottish poetry, as I try to show later, it also provides him with an indispensable strategic position in his laying the foundations of an introspective aesthetics.

If 'Disenchantments' is concerned with private chronology, then 'Turn Over a New Leaf', the second poem in *Dante's Drum-kit*, is a historical stock-taking. Dunn takes a backward glance at the century from the perspective of the nineties, and what he sees leads to the devaluation of historical time. His disillusionment (humankind is a 'disgrace' on the face of the Earth) leads him to prophesy a cosmic emigration to 'an unpolluted star', which clearly reveals his disbelief in historical development. The consequence of disillusion will be a kind of moralism which carries the load of an Age of Enlightenment rhetoric: 'Be the nice, not nasty Nineties, and nourish Man with sense' (*DDK*, 7). His pessimism about the present (the nineties are 'the writing on the wall', and are 'a killer virus'), as well as his anxiety about the time to come, represents a complete antithesis to Edwin Morgan's impatiently future-oriented vision. Dunn's basic attitude is much more that of a preserver of old values than of a

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[8] Dunn says, 'Italo Calvino once described the written word as a form of vegetation, which I like. These are botanic parishes around here, and I'm aware of "botanic" repeated several times in my recent poems. [...] I wouldn't like to be a geological poet: you can't grow too much on a stone'. In: Dunn, '*Northlight...*', 4.

[9] Robert Wright, 'Literary world pays tribute to MacCaig', *The Scotsman*, 24 January 1996, *The Scotsman and Scotland on Sunday 1996: News on CD* (Televisual Data Ltd.).

[10] Dunn, '"As a man sees..."', 64.

visionary or ludic experimenter: 'My enterprise [...] is to recuperate tolerance and benevolence, to preserve it into the time when technology produces the sort of cosmopolis that I think we're all going to live with'.[11] That the idea of change in general disturbs him so much, makes Dunn's a post-Movement rather than a post-Scottish Renaissance voice, if regarded from the wider perspective of poetry in the British Isles. Of twentieth-century Scottish poets, his sensibility is probably closest to that of Edwin Muir, another great dissenter who has a finely tuned but nonetheless weighty presence in *Dante's Drum-kit*. Historical time seems to lose both its teleology and the kind of openness Dunn was eager to secure to it in *Northlight*. When in 'Turn Over a New Leaf' lovers dream of their children's children leaving the Earth, that intergalactic journey will mean the end of history without fulfilment or any meaningful conclusion:

> O the terminated Filofax and unplugged data banks,
> The notes that tell the milkman, 'No. Farewell and many thanks.'
> (*DDK*, 7)

At the same time, Dunn's allusion to the first known re-start of human history in the cynically distorted image of 'Noah's Abattoir' (*DDK*, 7) comments on an apparently inescapable repetition of the past. The same idea crops up again in 'Body Echoes', which, however, is a much more sympathetically lyrical poem:

> Used time is answerless, continuing
> Its waste of life, so who and when they were
> Repeat themselves, over and over again.
> (*DDK*, 61)

[11] Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 29.

Dunn confronts a cyclic view of history with a linear one, as in *Northlight*. The progression of national history as evoked in Part IV of 'Disenchantments' is in fact a cyclic repetition of the population and the depopulation of the land, from its 'primeval ferns' (*DDK*, 35) to the 'forgotten people' (*DDK*, 36) of the Scottish diaspora. But, as opposed to the incoherence of private chronology, it implies a degree of continuity between past and present when he describes remembering as 'retrogression' (*DDK*, 35). In the allegorical 'Bedfordshire' Dunn portrays the modern equivalents of the indifferent (whom Dante in his *Divine Comedy* banished to Hell) refraining from active participation in social matters. As they say, the only feasible response is retirement from politics: '"Please, switch off the light. Disengage and resign"' (*DDK*, 17). While apparently Dunn does not share this opinion ('Oppositional snores won't correct what is wrong', *DDK*, 17), it might be argued that the creation and safeguarding of a pastoral privacy in *Dante's Drum-kit* is simply an act of withdrawal, or a form of 'oppositional snoring', rather than the kind of engaged critical perspective that his outsider's position assumed in *Northlight* or *Barbarians*.

In Dunn's opinion calendrical time, which becomes the site of a de-mythologised history in *Dante's Drum-kit*, constrains individual freedom. 'There's no elbow-room/ Granted by ticking clocks and passing days', he writes in 'Bagni di Lucca' (*DDK*, 23). It is an elegiac poem about the Brownings with strong stylistic reminiscences to *Elegies*: 'A spirit waltzes, falling, light as a leaf' (*DDK*, 24). 'Bagni di Lucca' appears to suggest that it is the 'ticking clocks and passing days' that kill us in reality. This idea may be meaningfully related to Larkin's realistically vivid 'Days', which concentrates in two short stanzas the apprehension of time that provides the epistemological background for such poems as 'Friday Night in the Royal Station Hotel', 'Forget What Did' and 'Aubade':

Where can we live but days?

Ah, solving that question
Brings the priest and the doctor
In their long coats
Running over the fields.[12]

Not unlike in Larkin's poetry, without faith in Providence and in any other religious warranty of afterlife, the sense of time imposing a restriction on our life leads to existential anxiety in Dunn, which also finds its way into the mood of *The Year's Afternoon*. The fear of death is certainly not as marked a presence in *Dante's Drum-kit* as anywhere in Larkin, but even in this way the book indicates a momentous shift compared to *Northlight*, where the simultaneity of Messianic time was supposed to fill the metaphysical vacuum which was left by a disbelief in religion. In a harsh world Dunn regards life as valuable in itself, and the conclusion of 'Disenchantments' locates the only source of (an ephemeral) salvation in the living, which also includes the natural environment: 'Look to the living, love them, and hold on' (*DDK*, 46).

Dunn's scepticism about calendrical time logically brings on a profound distrust of history and progress, as is also suggested by the way he pictures the Muse of Historiography: 'Clio's eyebrows can be imagined rising in embarrassment as she watches a poll tax return to a nation famished for decency'.[13] It may be argued that classical references in the discussion of a topical issue subvert and overrhetoricise an otherwise very up-to-date argument, which confidently works with statistical data,

[12] Philip Larkin, 'Days', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 67.
[13] Douglas Dunn, *Poll Tax: The Fiscal Fake*, Chatto Counterblasts, 12 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990), 11.

and quotes from a range of recent political papers and parliament speeches. Nevertheless, he tries to legitimise a detached viewpoint in a Scottish literary climate which has a fairly distinguished tradition of political commitment, and finds ample justification in Norman MacCaig, probably his favourite Scottish poet, whose work he edited in 1997.[14] Dunn focuses his essay '"As a man sees"' on MacCaig's disengagement:

> [History] is never a neutral or an antiseptic concept. Nor is it partial, illustrative, or illustrious. It is never an intellectual category available to philosophizing, or to elaboration through the description or interpretation of a significant event and its personalities. Instead, it is open to censure and dismissal. [...] A surprisingly large number of [...] poems from around the mid-1960s onwards cumulate into a statement of MacCaig's very considerable distemper.[15]

He quotes MacCaig's dictum ('I hate a man who calls his country "his"'[16]) both here and in his introduction to *Scotland: An Anthology*. The aphorism allows of more diverse interpretations than merely indicating reservations about nationalism. Dunn argues that the kind and degree of detachment which it reflects, and which MacCaig also voices in 'Patriot' ('My only country/ is six feet high'[17]), is essential for a poet to establish his or her 'self-generated liberty'.[18] Dunn believes that only by keeping some distance from extraliterary distractions is it possible to retain the kind of relaxed integrity (or what he calls in the essay on MacCaig the poet's 'elbow-room', the same phrase as he uses in 'Bagni di Lucca') which is needed for preserving a truthful poetic voice. He carefully points out that when the Muse of Historiography

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[14] Norman MacCaig, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Douglas Dunn (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997).
[15] Dunn, '"As a man sees..."', 55.
[16] Ibid., 58.
[17] Norman MacCaig, 'Patriot', in *Selected Poems*, ed. by Douglas Dunn (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 92.
[18] Dunn, '"As a man sees..."', 58.

appears in MacCaig's poem 'Clio', she 'yawns with boredom'.[19] Precisely this is what seems to be the weakness of the strategic position Dunn proposes in the nineties: Clio, the personification of our historical consciousness, may be mortified (as in 'Turn Over a New Leaf'), embarrassed, or just bored, but she is never represented as angry.

Neither the disappointment felt over the pointlessness of history nor the devaluation of private time prevents Dunn from making an attempt at bringing the two together again in *Dante's Drum-kit*. However, it is debatable to what extent he aspires towards a new synthesis. One may be tempted to see this attempt as an act of securing his private ground in a way which he describes in the essay on MacCaig: 'I suspect that one of the reasons why a poet confronts subjects like history and politics is to affirm [his or her] freedom, widen it, or defend it'.[20] It may prove my point that while in *Northlight* the typical iconography of moonlight over the estuary is a means of locating a moment in time which embraces history, here, in poems like 'Early Autumn' and 'Just Standing There', it only serves to define a Wordsworthian 'spot of time' in a strictly private chronology. Ultimately, not even the combined glories of 'Light, land and water' can heal the wounds the wars left in the survivors' hearts, Dunn suggests in 'Body Echoes' (*DDK*, 61). Although in the same poem a nightscape with the 'national moon' invites a politically charged reflection on time with a marked Scottish accent (note the 'thistle gardens by the railway'), history passes by regardless of the natural environment. When Dunn asserts that even if historians measure the light but cannot or do not measure its beauty just as they can never fathom the sorrows of 'any broken love' (*DDK*, 62), it feels like a surgical bisection of time into a collective and a private chronology without the prospect of

[19] Ibid., 59.
[20] Ibid., 58.

ever achieving a new synthesis between them. In the penultimate verse paragraph the image of children playing hide-and-seek among the 'Tilted epitaphs' of a cemetery conjures up an existential fear of disorientation as well as, taking the route of an allusion to MacDiarmid's 'The Eemis Stane', a more universal sense of dissipation, while specific references to emigration and Scottish place names like Glasgow, St Andrews, Perth and Inverness present the poem as an elegy for the country's citizenship.

Rather than earning a historically representative moment, what Dunn achieves is reconstructing the spirit of the place, which, considering the synthesis created from landscape and history in *Northlight*, marks an apparent retreat from engagement. While in that book he arguably projected the significance of the region onto an inclusive national context (or at least to a rural aspect of it) by way of metonymy, in *Dante's Drum-kit* what is meant to be local stays local. In 'Disenchantments' he recreates place from 'open air' and 'unwritten names' (*DDK*, 36), which is even less tangible than the view of moonlight over the firth. Place is not even a view here. It tends to become an idea, and is spoken of in the past tense: 'its physical/ Selfhood was beautiful' (*DDK*, 37). In Part III of the same poem the image of 'water and sky' becomes associated with the realm of privacy (*DDK*, 34). A similar iconography is employed in Dunn's 1990 essay 'A City Discovered: Dundee', whose motivation is very similar to that behind 'The Pride of Fife', except that this later piece is more pregnant with the people's history of the place, and apparently springs from the material he collected for *Scotland: An Anthology*. While 'tricks of light' shivering on the Tay Rail Bridge and the view from Dundee Law may inspire a few unlimited moments when 'local and Scottish time and space are held in an exhilarating but probably illusory perspective in which past and present seem to

coexist in a single tense',[21] this is merely a recapitulation of ideas from *Northlight* without innovation, and it does not appear in the poems of *Dante's Drum-kit*. Given the abstract nature of iconography in this book, it may be the case that Dunn does the same thing as he criticises in W. N. Herbert, namely, that he changes Scotland into a 'non-specific, dreamt, "quasi-fictional"' entity.[22] Probably the only thing that saves him from making Scotland 'a country of the mind' is his strong interest in documentary-making as seen in *St Kilda's Parliament*, while more lately, in *Dante's Drum-kit*, 'Dressed to Kill' illustrates that ambition. Nonetheless, 'Disenchantments' sharply contrasts the spirit of a place with its history: 'Static me unlearns// Feral history [...]/ Learning instead [...]/ Identity' (*DDK*, 35). 'Moorlander' not only makes the same point in an even more direct manner, but also suggests that this split is the consequence of an unfortunate turn in, or the decline of, history:

> Time turned into place.
> Society gave up its ghost,
> Geography its nationhood.
> (*DDK*, 50)

When Dunn speaks of 'identity' in 'Disenchantments', he probably means the spirit of a place, which is timeless, and evolves from the qualities of its natural environment and from the psychology of its inhabitants. In the case of North-East Fife, it is an identity defined by the rhythm and tempo of the annual cycle of agriculture, as opposed to, say, life in the fishing villages of the south-eastern part of the county.

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[21] Douglas Dunn, 'A City Discovered: Dundee', in *The Glasgow Herald Book of Scotland*, ed. by Arnold Kemp and Harry Reid (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1990), 138-53 (p. 139).
[22] Douglas Dunn, 'Caledonia Dreaming' [a review of *Dream State: The New Scottish Poets*, ed. by Daniel O'Rourke], *Poetry Review*, 84.1 (1994), 22-24 (p. 23).

Dunn presents a less abstract way of looking at history when considering the state of the English language, which, he assumes, reflects political dilemmas both home and abroad. He is inclined to derive Britain's cultural situation from the post-imperial condition of the English language,[23] just as he drops a reference to 'our very tired language' in 'Australian Dream-Essay' (*DDK*, 27). Australia provides a good example for the evolution of the language on a trajectory which is noticeably different from that of the mother country: not just in the poetry of Les Murray (described with benevolent irony as 'a large poet', implying that Dunn regards him as a major poet), but more generally in a cultural dissimilarity that coincides with the making of a new identity and a new life. 'Australian Dream-Essay' turns upside down the idea of the *Ausländer* as explored in *Northlight* in a very interesting way when he points out that descendants of those one-time emigrants who were strangers to a strange land have by now become strangers to their place of origin in Britain: 'What get in the way are their origins. What gets in the way is us' (*DDK*, 27). In his opinion the logical consequence of proven cultural independence is nothing but political independence. But the problem with the poem's register is that when he says 'Grant them a deserved identity, and they'll teach us something' (*DDK*, 27), it sounds like a prayer rather than a political imperative. It also reflects a centralist perspective, whereas independence is supposed to be sweeter when it is fought for than when it is granted by Westminster, even if the latter seemed to be the common practice in twentieth-century British politics. Still, it has to be admitted that the case of the 2000 Australian Referendum put a (however slight) twist in the post-imperial history of Britain.

[23] O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil', 13.

Given the sympathies expressed in 'Australian Dream-Essay', then, Dunn's pressing the case of linguistic difference in the home context seems to be aiming at some form of a Scottish political autonomy. He distinguishes the official language of Britain (English) from the complicated issue of British citizenship (often confused or associated with an English identity) in 'Audenesques for 1960', a recollection of some imaginary conversations with one of his favourite English poets:

> So what if you were English? I speak that language,
> But not its nationality.
> (*DDK*, 91)

Dunn complicates linguistic perceptions of class and nationality when he refers to Auden's poem about barbarian invasion and the dead poet is imagined as saying: '"and don't, when I'm about,/ Murder 'The Fall of Rome' with your Scottish accent"' (*DDK*, 90). The same political and linguistic agenda lies at the heart of *The Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry*, which presents the three acknowledged literary languages of Scotland: Scots, Gaelic and English. Dunn named his introductory essay 'Language and Liberty'.[24] The title invokes the long tradition of the love of freedom in Scottish literature (from Barbour's *The Bruce* to Robert Burns's 'Love and Liberty: A Cantata'), a theme to which Dunn devotes a whole chapter in his *Scotland: An Anthology*. The introduction is intended as an answer to T. S. Eliot's 1919 essay 'Was There a Scottish Literature?'. The literary product of the years passed since 1919 could prove the opposite of what Eliot had to say. Dunn is right to suggest that twentieth-century literature inseparably ties up with political and linguistic struggles, and, no doubt, Scotland is a case in point. 'A

[24] Douglas Dunn, 'Language and Liberty' [introduction], in *The Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), xvii-xlvi.

language is a dialect with an army and a navy', he quotes Max Weinreich's aphorism (*FB*, xvii). Eliot probably never even dreamt that Scotland would achieve a degree of self-determination within just eighty years after he questioned the legitimacy of its cultural tradition.

Dunn distinguishes cultural nationalism from its political counterpart in 'Language and Liberty' (*FB*, xix). While Catherine Lockerbie maintains that this introduction is 'an erudite tracking of the development of Scotland's specific cultural identity',[25] Neil Corcoran criticises in Dunn that he is 'almost ahistorically disengaged from the struggles that many of these poems express or embody', and it seems to him to be an 'under-reading' to assume that these 'tensions and polarities have now reached a plateau of pluralistic possibility'.[26] Two years later Dunn gives voice to a similar doubt about linguistic plurality in 'Writing Things Down', in the paragraph quoted in my introduction. While he lays a great deal of emphasis on the idea of language mix and bilingualism in 'Language and Liberty', he expresses a desire for a political recognition of the interpretive community in which those linguistic choices can freely operate:

> Despite the survival of poetry in three languages [...] there seems a hunger for unity, not through a single language, but through one nationality that sanctions a tripled linguistic and poetic experience. An introduction to an anthology of poetry might seem an improper occasion on which to introduce the topic of nationalism; but it can hardly be avoided without tampering with the record. (*FB*, xxvii)

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[25] Catherine Lockerbie, 'Barking mad at top volume as Scots poets fight and flyte', *The Scotsman*, 8 August 1992, p. 7.
[26] Neil Corcoran, 'Langwij, lilt and literature' [a review of *FB*], *Times Literary Supplement*, 31 July 1992, p. 21.

Certainly it does not, one might add, since the Faber book is not just 'an' anthology of poetry. That it appeared in the year of Hugh MacDiarmid's centenary seems emblematic of the political agenda of Scottish independence. When suggesting that 'Love of a native language is a powerful force in poetry, especially in countries where it can be subjected to political pressures [...] or frustrated, or diminished by depopulation and emigration' (*FB*, xxix), Dunn actually re-states in the Gaelic context the point of Edwin Morgan's 1971 essay 'Registering the Reality of Scotland'. Morgan wrote: 'linguistics and national boundaries will often refuse to coincide, and yet, as the history of a small, much-conquered, much-oppressed country like Hungary shows clearly, the language of the people can be the strongest and in the end most potent national binding-force and inspiration'.[27] Dunn quotes nearly two pages of Edwin Muir's *Scott and Scotland*, whose conclusion, that Scotland can only produce a national literature in the English language, owes much to Muir's experience of the diminishment of small northern communities which has its parallel in Dunn's perception of rural Scotland. 'Much of what Muir says is still of interest', Dunn suggests (*FB*, xxxi). It may be of interest for Dunn, who features Muir in at least two instances in *Dante's Drum-kit* as well as elsewhere, but apparently not for the wider public, as the general bewilderment that surrounded the 1982 reprint of *Scott and Scotland* signified.[28] 'Language and Liberty', though, ends on an optimistic note: earlier 'patrioteering' is still a skeleton in the 'Caledonian cupboard', but he is right to recognise the twentieth century as one of the finest periods in the history of Scottish literature (*FB*, xlv-xlvi).

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[27] Morgan, 'Registering the Reality of Scotland', 154.

[28] Hendry writes: 'If Calvinists believed in a multiplicity of transcendent beings, one of whom was responsible for the arts, we might expect him (or her) to look with disfavour on "The Predicament of the Scottish Writer", an evening organised by Polygon Books. [...] As the evening drew to a close, I felt it had been a blunder of the order of the Tate's famous display of bricks, not for being controversial or daring, but as someone declaimed, as the Cultural Non Event of the Year'. In: Joy Hendry, 'Editorial', *Chapman*, 35-36 (1983), 1.

Although, as Alan Taylor ironically notes in the wake of a literary debate surrounding it, the Faber anthology 'prompted a wee panic in the breistie o' the nation's poets',[29] it is hard to see Dunn's book as other than the result of fair and well-balanced editorial work. He presents around seventy poets on nearly four hundred pages, and he decided to 'exclude himself in'.[30] He omitted Ian Hamilton Finlay for reasons of taste and Alasdair Maclean withdrew his poems from the paperback edition 'on political grounds' (*FB*, xlvi). He presents just as many poems from Muir as from MacDiarmid; and while MacCaig has the most poems, MacDiarmid gets the most pages. Those born in or after 1950 are represented with not more than three poems, which suggests that his guiding principle was a mix of volume and variety in terms of the older and younger generations respectively. A backwash of this consistency may be that Carol Ann Duffy and Liz Lochhead, for instance, get a share that their significance in twentieth-century Scottish poetry arguably goes beyond. Dunn's editing is functional enough to give the reader the impression that it was 'a hectic century for Scottish poetry', as he says, 'one filled with thrilling turbulence, and in which the stakes have been high – the survival of a national identity' (*FB*, xlvi). A lot of poems are about the predicament of Scotland: some of them are pessimistic like Muir's, some optimistic like MacDiarmid's, some sentimental like Lewis Spence's; most of them political and only few of them lyrical in a disinterested way. There is not much love poetry, no humorous verse at all, and only a pinch of nature poetry, by Andrew Young. Still, it is exaggeration to charge Dunn with a 'nationalist stance', as Maclean does,[31] except when nationalist is meant to be understood as 'not unionist'.

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[29] Alan Taylor, 'Poetic Licence', *Scotland on Sunday*, 12 July 1992, p. 16.
[30] Dósa, 'A Different Drummer', 27.
[31] Alasdair Maclean, 'Poetry protest' [a letter], *The Scotsman*, 7 August 1992, p. 12.

Dunn's contemporary anthology is not without its precedents of course. It justifies his work that a quarter of a century had passed since the last similar attempt, Maurice Lindsay's *Modern Scottish Poetry*. Lindsay provides no introduction, only a brief 'Preface' followed by a poem by himself. The poem suggests that Scotland is a multifaced entity that resists definition ('Scotland's a sense of change, and endless/ becoming'), which is acceptable; the problem with this standpoint is that with the same gesture Lindsay deprives the country of its factual existence: 'Scotland's an attitude of mind!'.[32] Not only does he put Scotland between inverted commas, as Dunn would say, but he seems to be content with its political non-existence. Lindsay included much less politically oriented verse and many more love lyrics (many of them second-rate) than Dunn, while he also included himself in generously: only MacDiarmid, William Soutar and Sydney Goodsir Smith got more space than himself in terms of the number of poems. MacCaig and Scott's *Contemporary Scottish Verse: 1959-1969* came out shortly after Lindsay's Faber book and it wants to teach its own lesson. Whereas their introduction starts off with the familiar idea that the language situation and the assertion of difference from England are the number one, and MacDiarmid's literary renaissance is the number two cornerstone of twentieth-century Scottish culture, MacCaig and Scott devise a third way of representing the poetry of Scotland. They want to be neither involved in Scottish politics (as Dunn would be later), nor lyrically uninvolved (as Lindsay was before them), but they try to be political on an international scale, as is clear from their choice of 'Laotian Peasant Shot' by George Bruce, 'The Flaming Man' by Tom Buchan or 'Ballade of Beauties' by Alexander Scott. They also aim to be internationally minded in general, especially when considering the poems on

[32] Maurice Lindsay, 'Preface', in *Modern Scottish Poetry: An Anthology of the Scottish Renaissance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 19-21 (p. 21).

Cézanne, Giacometti or Marilyn Monroe. Their conclusion that 'there is not a great deal of *directly* political writing being produced, and most of that – as is usual – is not very good'[33] probably springs from a disbelief in the aesthetic possibility of engagement on the part of MacCaig, who, to remind ourselves, is one of Dunn's favourite Scottish poets.

The economic consequences of what Dunn calls the political unreality of Scotland are often regarded as the major cause of 'emigration'. MacCaig and Scott explain that most of 'the exiles, or refugees, are naturally to be found in England'.[34] The latent and refined irony of this statement draws attention to the fact that, given the fortunate absence of a modern-day dictatorship either in England or Scotland, the use of such terms as 'exile' or 'refugee' in the British context may appear rather awkward or over-dramatic, certainly in the last third of the twentieth century. But in *Dante's Drum-kit* Dunn turns emigration into a metaphor of the universal dilemma of rootlessness and new beginnings. Apart from the usual linguistic and cultural context, the idea also emerges in some unexpected but suggestive places, for example in the image of 'emigrant fowl' in 'Sketches' (*DDK*, 115). Dunn's sympathy for the rootless results in a generally elegiac tone, which tends to transfer Scotland's existence into an undefined past. The idea that losing touch with a place leads to alienation in time connects *Northlight* and *Dante's Drum-kit*. It is by the same route that he magnifies a fictitious ancestor to 'Infinity's emigrant' in 'Moorlander' (*DDK*, 50), which reads as a stylistic tribute to Heaney's bog poems. The sense of elusiveness and rootlessness link up in the image of the moorlander running 'like a silent ballad' (*DDK*, 49), who, not unlike the witch girl in the poem

[33] Norman MacCaig and Alexander Scott, 'Introduction', in *Contemporary Scottish Verse: 1959-1969*, ed. by Norman MacCaig and Alexander Scott (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970), 15-22 (p. 21).
[34] Ibid.

of the same title, seems to turn into an archetype of Scottishness. What differentiates 'Moorlander' from Heaney's similar poems, though, is the Protean nature of this ancestor figure. The evasive nature of the moorlander embodies our loosening grip of the past:

> Scholarly trackers stir
> Embers, maukins' bones,
> Plucked feathers from a stolen hen.
> They miss him by day and weeks.
> [...]
> He can go as an earth-trout.
> He is as hoof, paw, and stealthy wing.
> He can turn into tree or rock.
> (*DDK*, 49-50)

Dunn introduces the image of today's emigrants but the conclusion to which the analogy between the past and the present leads conveys less the sense of a synthesis than the sense of a nation doomed to eternal self-alienation, and is accompanied by lingering nostalgia. '"Bare Ruined Choirs"', a poem which borrows its title from a Shakespearean line discussed by Edwin Muir,[35] acts to intensify this elegiac tone about the Scottish past. The history evoked through the mediaeval figure of a blind vagrant student has as its perspective a sense of predetermined rootlessness: 'I climb/ Resentment's mountain, where a stick-touched trail/ Ends in a country west of time' (*DDK*, 55). Dunn magnifies a similar sense of predestination, and projects it into the distant future in the image of universal emigration in 'Turn Over a New Leaf', though the reference to 'Auld Lang Syne' being sung on New Year's Eve restricts the poem's horizon to the English-speaking world. 'Australian Dream-Essay' records the

[35] Dunn writes, 'Edwin Muir wrote that you will look in vain in Scottish poetry for lines like "And peace proclaims olives of endless age," "Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang," or "I saw Eternity the other night"' (*WTD*, 91).

next (post-imperial) phase of emigration, the alienation of second and third-generation emigrants from their origins. It is probably the only poem where he looks at differentiation without a hint of nostalgia. While in Robert Crawford's yet unpublished poem 'Credo' 'Perth in Australia believes in Perth in Scotland', Dunn rules out any such interest. He also reminds the reader of the more complicated ethnic origins of modern Australia: 'You'll just be who you are with a weakening claim on grandparents'/ European or Asian nostalgia' (*DDK*, 27).

*Scotland: An Anthology* is another major attempt beside the Faber selection at the (re)construction of a cultural synopsis of the country. In his introduction Dunn is careful to open up the prospect of an infinite process of interpretation, when, in contrast with the double-bind of some obsolete 'Scottish characteristics', he presents the image of the kaleidoscope, which 'expresses variousness, the illusion of infinity, multiples, and a recurrent but unpredictable symmetry', and which is, by the way, a Scottish invention (*SA*, 5). Nonetheless, there have been some critics who disagree with this hermeneutic standpoint. Lindsay, who had compiled his own similar anthology (with a generous amount of himself in it),[36] writes that Dunn's book is 'more of an argument than a celebration'.[37] Although Lindsay might be right to observe that Dunn presents 'a fairly grim Scotland [with] plenty of politics and passion, but not very much humour',[38] the political load the book carries is one of necessity rather than inconvenience. As George Szirtes says, 'There are historical moments of national consciousness and you don't need to be able to tell a hawk from a handsaw to realise you are living in one'.[39] Dunn was keenly aware of that

[36] Maurice Lindsay, ed., *Scotland: An Anthology* (London: Robert Hale and Company, 1974).
[37] Maurice Lindsay, '*Scotland: An Anthology*' [a review of *SA*], *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 August 1991, p. 21.
[38] Ibid.
[39] George Szirtes, 'Standard bearers of a nation bringing it all back home' [a review of *The New Penguin Book of Scottish Verse* ed. by Robert Crawford and Mick Imlah], *The Times* (Times 2: Books), 15 November 2000, p. 18.

moment, as is revealed in his use of Santayana's maxim: 'a people that chooses to forget its past condemns itself to relive it' (*SA*, 5).

Although Dunn achieves in *Scotland: An Anthology* what he defines as his aim in the introduction, that is compiling a book 'with deep roots and a topical peak' (*SA*, 5), the degree and nature of his own political engagement is not all that obvious. His suspicion about politics under the cover of topicality comes out right on the first page when he dedicates the book to his family (as opposed to Romantic heroes of liberty like Petőfi, who without second thoughts superimposed the common cause on privacy), and is confirmed at the end of the introduction, where, drawing on MacCaig's above quoted aphorism, he says: 'I don't call Scotland mine. I call it Scotland' (*SA*, 9). Dunn seems to imply emigration as the destiny of the Scots. Although the chapter that he dedicates to the history of Scots abroad is intended as a celebration of their talent and courage, the idea that the book actually concludes on this note leads to the feeling as if emigration was the consummation of Scottish history. Finally, not unlike Lindsay before and Herbert after him, Dunn can be turning the country's actuality into a psychological evidence when he refers to Robert Louis Stevenson's 1882 essay 'The Foreigner at Home': 'in spite of the near-evanishment of the Scots vernacular, something close to its spirits persists in accent, in how mind saturates another, available and associated language, English, or in what Stevenson called "a strong Scotch accent of the mind"' (*SA*, 5). This final point may be difficult to prove in the case of such extensively travelled Scottish writers as John Burnside, who speaks English without a Scottish accent, though probably easier in the case of, say, Kenneth White, who writes in *French* with a 'strong Scotch accent of the mind'. It can also be said that there is no need to prove it at all, and Dunn has an answer for this, too, when he contends that 'language doesn't subtract from national identity' (*WTD*, 88). On the whole, whereas Lindsay's book is more of a

literary anthology, and W. Gordon Smith's similar enterprise amounts to but a journalistic selection of aphorisms, anecdotes and jokes,[40] Dunn confidently sails the waters of cultural anthropology without getting lost in any of its tributaries.

The idea of emigration leads to social criticism in some poems of *Dante's Drum-kit*, though Dunn rarely transcends the confines of historical allegory and philosophical moralism. He gives a documentary survey which is very similar to the sequence about eighteenth-century Scottish writers in *St Kilda's Parliament*. What the poems 'The Crossroads of the Birds', '"Bare Ruined Choirs"', 'The Penny Gibbet' and 'Gaberlunzie' have in common, apart from a winter scenery whose barrenness reinforces their elegiac mood, is the exploration of pauperdom as a potential metaphor for Scotland's economic position in the Union with England. 'Gaberlunzie', also being an archaic designation for the travelling beggar in Scotland, takes its title from a popular song in Allan Ramsay's 1724 collection *The Tea-table Miscellany*. Dunn projects contemporary social sensibility onto a seventeenth-century beggar's figure, and with the same act he enlarges the Gaberlunzie's condition into a national dilemma: 'half-life, national waif,/ Earth-pirate of the thistle and the thorn' (*DDK*, 57). 'Preserve and Renovate', which is another moralising poem, evokes 'The Apple Tree' from *St Kilda's Parliament*, in that domestic duties assume an allegorical function. However, in the present case he regards the ethical imperative in a context wider than that of nationality: '*Do what you need to do, and do it now*' (*DDK*, 95). While locating the vehicle of his moral allegory in a private world does not subtract from his conviction about the importance of social engagement, it may lead to a sense of the isolation of the poem

[40] W. Gordon Smith, *This is My Country: A Personal Blend of the Purest Scotch* (London: Souvenir Press, 1976).

from a public context when Dunn confines his conclusion to a polemic between his own and a father figure's understanding of 'duty':

> That is my work, though he won't understand;
> Nor could my father. It's what I do,
> This risk of feeling, that the sweet and true
> Might be preserved, presented by my hand
> Among the many others who do this
> For the same sake that is obedience to
> Time and experience, for what is due
> To being, to be life's accomplice.
> (*DDK*, 96)

In *Dante's Drum-kit* Dunn's social criticism is likely to find inspiration or motivation in the past. Although he inserts contemporary impressions and references to HIV, burger boxes and so on in the poem 'Swigs', it starts off with, and concludes on, some fifties memories from his own childhood in Glasgow: 'Old drunks from years ago/ Search for home' (*DDK*, 65). The poem presents modern-day gaberlunzies, drug addicts and alcoholics caught in the trap of their own meaningless lives: 'Tam o' Shanters, Drunk Men/ Who didn't make it home' (*DDK*, 70). Dunn does not contrast metropolitan depression with the comforting background of the pastoral world as earlier in 'Broughty Ferry', although he does compare it to his own situation as a writer. But while his preceding book turns Arcadia into a practical starting point for social criticism, prosperous domesticity in *Dante's Drum-kit*, which at first appears to have the same function, leads to the poet's detachment from society: 'Measuring life/ By domesticity,/ Libraries, income/ And furniture,/ I've lost sight of his/ Failure's status' (*DDK*, 69). Unlike the subsequent 'Poor People's Cafés', 'Swigs' records the lives of these people without commenting on the broader situation, except for one occasion, when the observing self reflects on his own perception of the value system, which, in Renan's terms, is supposed to be

'undivided': 'I am ashamed/ Of my country' (*DDK*, 66). Although both poems feature decisively short, two or three-beat lines, compared to 'Poor People's Cafés', the similar metrical arrangement conveys a more relaxed prosody in 'Swigs'.

Other poems that transcribe social criticism as a historical matter include 'Penny Gibbet', an anti-monarchical piece apparently set in the same period as 'Gaberlunzie', and 'Nineteen-Thirteen', which records a working-class family drama from the female point of view and in a style very different from that of the 'Terry Street' sequence. Dunn's translation of Racine's *Andromache* may also convey the corresponding impression of politics being projected back into a distant past, although the fact that it is a commissioned work arguably complicates writerly motivations.[41] Like nearly every other play by Racine, *Andromache* focuses on the conflict between private interests and public duty, and is written in a dense style (using a relatively compact vocabulary compared to, say, Shakespeare), which is hard to render into contemporary English. Although the translation has certain merits, this linguistic problem considerably alienates the preoccupations of the play from the modern reader's concerns. Finally in this context, while it is helpful that Dunn arranged his social poems in one sequence (Part III) of *Dante's Drum-kit* and that there is a sense of chronological development from the primeval times (in 'Moorlander') to modernity (in 'Poor People's Cafés') within the sequence, the section concludes with the nature lyric 'Queen February', which points away from the direction of involvement. The treatment of femininity in the abstract winterscape as an all-pervading natural principle links up with 'Witch-girl', but in this case it lacks national political resonances.

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[41] Douglas Dunn, trans., *Andromache*, by Jean Racine (London: Faber and Faber, 1990). The translation was commissioned by BBC Radio Scotland and the programme was first broadcast on 24 November 1989.

Direct engagement is more convincing in the belligerent poems of *Dante's Drum-kit*. 'Dressed to Kill' was commissioned by the BBC for the series *Words on Film*, and was shot on location at Stirling Castle, Holyrood Palace and elsewhere in Scotland. The printed version contains some additional material in Parts XII and XIII. The poem takes its theme from the contradiction between Scotland's proud military tradition and the country's apparent failure to defend itself:

> It gave away its independence
> Without a fight, for trade, peace, pence.
>
> A land of soldiers, mind, and science,
> A nation turned into a province!
>
> *With a hey tuttie-tattie and a tow-row-row.*
> (*DDK*, 130)

Here Dunn thinks of Robert Burns's 'Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn', originally written for the air 'Hey tuttie tattie', and creates a voice which manages both to project the distant past into the political present and to remain historical. '"Pour l'amour, oui; pour la guerre, non!"' – the satire of this quoted line bites (*DDK*, 132). Dunn cites it here as well as in *Scotland: An Anthology*. But, given his preference for domesticity, it would be hard to argue that the same could not be applied to himself, too. Part III of the poem delivers a close reformulation of Burns's 'Such a parcel of rogues in a nation':

> Fareweel to a' our Scotish fame,
> Fareweel our ancient glory;
> Fareweel even to the Scotish name,
> Sae fam'd in martial story!
> Now Sark rins o'er the Solway sands,
> And Tweed rins to the ocean,
> To mark whare England's province stands,
> Such a parcel of rogues in a nation!

[...]
We're bought and sold for English gold,
Such a parcel of rogues in a nation![42]

The Scots diction in Part IV provides an exceptionally rare example of the linguistic formulation of demotic consciousness in Dunn's verse, and its refrain 'up yer erse!' adds a degree of comic liveliness to the dynamic of the diction. This section contains some of the brightest sparks in the poem, and it is all the more a pity that he avoids using Scots for either satirical or serious purposes elsewhere in his poetry. 'Dressed to Kill' is rich in irony ('No MacNapoleon, no dictator,/ Few ideologues, no liberator!', *DDK*, 135) but the final conclusion records disappointment's nihilism:

*Whaash my nashun?*
No answer. Silence's oration.

*With a hey tuttie-tattie!*
(*DDK*, 145)

The poem's frequent and unexpected changes in rhythm, tempo and pitch create a jagged prosody that is unusual for Dunn, and influence readerly expectations based on the book's title in an interesting way. While *Dante's Drum-kit* receives its title from the rhyme scheme of 'Disenchantments', it creates an absorbing tension between the aesthetic and the historical functions of poetry when we contrast that technical consideration with the actual idea of beating the drums, as reflected in the militant dynamism of 'Dressed to Kill'. *Terza rima*, described as 'Dante's drum-kit' in 'Disenchantments' (*DDK*, 38), certainly has its own forward drive, but when writing about a public topic in 'Dressed to Kill', Dunn chooses to employ less

[42] Robert Burns, 'Such a parcel of rogues in a nation', in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. by James Kinsley, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), II: *Text*, 643-44 (pp. 643-44).

complicated forms which can be effectively associated with the rhythm of marching: three or four-beat rhyming couplets or thumping two-beat lines. To reflect the many angles from which wars are seen and narrated, he also uses a wide range of poetic devices including dialogues, direct and indirect quotations, exclamations and rhetorical questions, onomatopoeia, refrains, different kinds of irony as well as various voices and registers. There is just a small variety of rhyme schemes but these tend to contain full rhymes, which propel the verse forward inasmuch as the reader involuntarily anticipates the next chiming syllable. The poem also features snippets of prose, which work very efficiently in their directness. 'Dressed to Kill' conveys Dunn's ambivalent feelings towards the military traditions of Scotland. Nonetheless, it is not this ambivalence that may blunt the poem's edge of social criticism but rather his general disbelief in engagement: 'Intelligent armies run away' (*DDK*, 140). But even this way he manages to become the living conscience of society:

> Mischief, duty. – Aye, ambivalence.
> Rinse hands, rinse, re-rinse, re-rinse,
>
> And if the blood still won't wash off
> Maybe it's me can't get enough!
> (*DDK*, 145)

Only when his anger goes into his social criticism undiluted does Dunn achieve a really convincing expression of engagement, as in certain parts of 'Poor People's Cafés': 'Twenty per cent?/ Go, tax their breath!' (*DDK*, 79). The poem was originally published as a postscript to his 1990 pamphlet *Poll Tax: The Fiscal Fake*. Inasmuch as it portrays the results of Conservative economic policy, it is the companion poem to 'Swigs'. But 'Poor People's Cafés' performs more than merely providing a social tableau, as Dunn gets involved in the political argument:

'Financial link'?
That's what you say?
That's how *you* think?
Put it this way –
I say you stink;
You tax the poor.
(*DDK*, 80)

It is also in these argumentative parts where the two-beat lines reach their quickest tempo. Political directness does not necessarily subtract from a poem's merit, as MacCaig and Scott assert. Dunn makes a valid point when he says in an interview: 'To dissociate poetry from everyday life weakens literature'.[43] Topicality may even strengthen the roots of poetry in society, especially when a poet can effectively draw on some notable precedents. Here Dunn does so by conjuring up Burns's line 'A man's a man for a' that!' from the poem 'Is there for honest poverty'. It is a literary gesture that helps to fill Dunn's poem with anger on behalf of the poor and give expression to the poor man's dignity and defiance:

*For a' that*, aye,
*For a' that*, men
Could live and die,
The angry pen
Fall from the hand
And nothing change
In this hurt land
Until that strange
Obsession dies
And begging-bowl
Free enterprise
Goes to the wall.
(*DDK*, 81)

[43] Kenneth Roy, 'Poetic Justice' [an interview with Douglas Dunn], *Scotland on Sunday*, 11 March 1990, 29-30 (p. 29).

The most obvious non-poetic manifestation of Dunn's engagement in the nineties is the pamphlet *Poll Tax: The Fiscal Fake*. He justifies the writing of this pamphlet by pointing out that this kind of tax is not just obsolete (its history goes back to Ptolemaic Egypt), but has always been challenged by public opinion. He also problematises perceptions of internal politics by reflecting to what extent the way that the tax was introduced in Britain reveals the survival of 'colonial psychology': 'This time the "natives" are all in the "mother country", which might even explain why Scotland was used as a laboratory for such an extraordinary anachronism'.[44] He notes that neither Scotland nor Wales voted in favour of it. The awareness of economic dependence and its social drawbacks, as well as the overt antipathy against the redefinition of freedom by the Conservative Government as 'the freedom to buy and sell',[45] lead him to question the legitimacy of Westminster's power north of the Border:

> there are additional factors at work in Scotland, where a resurgent national identity has begun to make itself felt in politics and culture, and where conscience was never felt as "the beggar's virtue". In Scotland, this present Government is seen as being of the Government, by the Government, and for the Government. It certainly isn't of, by and for the people of Scotland.[46]

But Dunn wrote his political tract, as Edna Robertson suggests, 'from behind the battle lines with a degree of trepidation'.[47] He may have been apprehensive of a possible uprising when he suggested: 'Before you can say "Rob Roy McGregor", blokes in tartan plaids and waving basket swords will be asking you if you are for the poll tax or agin it'.[48] And while in 'Dressed to Kill' he castigates the inability of the

[44] Dunn, *Poll Tax*, 13.
[45] Ibid., 31.
[46] Ibid., 30.
[47] Edna Robertson, 'Paradox of the Poll Tax', *Glasgow Herald*, 31 March 1990.
[48] Dunn, *Poll Tax*, 45.

Scottish people to join their forces for a common cause ('*Not Bonnie Princes but Geronimo!*', 135), by figuring the famous outlaw in the pamphlet he eventually seems to sanction the Rob Roy type of individual justice as opposed to the national solidarity that Wallace embodies.

Despite his concerns with contemporary social handicaps, Dunn does not engage himself unconditionally in the political debates of the day in *Dante's Drum-kit*. As John Bayley says in his review of the book, there are 'No more great committed romantics, Shelleys, Byrons, Petőfis'.[49] Bayley lays out the history of poetic disengagement from Baudelaire and Leopardi, poets whose 'effect on their reading public was in time no less influential, but who always stood a significant distance outside society'.[50] This distance, Bayley suggests, was reaffirmed in the time of Modernism, in the work of Cavafy, Pound, and (in the English critic's opinion) even in Eliot and Auden. The legacy of Modernism as summarised in Auden's often cited maxim 'Poetry makes nothing happen' still perplexes and haunts poets in the British Isles. Some of them, though, like for instance Edwin Morgan, decided to construct their own traditions of an involved aesthetics from the foreign examples of Mayakovsky, Pasternak or Attila József. Morgan, a contemporary of the MacCaig who renounces political inspiration in poetry, wrote in the introduction to his 1961 collection of translations *Sovpoems*:

> I would venture to claim that what Blok did with symbolism, what Mayakovsky did with futurism, what Neruda did with surrealism, holds a lesson for us which we don't learn from our Yeats, Stevens, Pound or Eliot. The lesson – without trying to spell it out – is related to the fact that literary movements should serve the ends of life as well as the ends of art.[51]

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[49] Bayley, 'A Poet more than Himself', 54.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Edwin Morgan, 'Introduction' [to *Sovpoems*], in *Collected Translations* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), 27-31 (p. 27).

'"Outside me, no salvation": the old slogan of the Church fits the case sardonically well', Bayley goes on to suggest.[52] The case strangely echoes Dunn's argument in his lecture *The Topical Muse*. He avoids discussing the potentially revolutionary spirit of poetry, or literature as a possible forum where a redemption from social hardships or economic oppression might take place, when he argues: 'Contemporary poetry is immersed in the real world from which it tries to piece together whatever fragments of salvation it can, through individual sacraments, individual or eccentric glimpses of what spiritual truths can be found'.[53] It is precisely these 'eccentric glimpses' on which he establishes *Northlight*. But when these epiphanies and sacraments are 'individual', it may be the case that salvation, too, works only for the individual, as is the case in *Dante's Drum-kit*. Bayley takes a step back from the implied individualist standpoint when he says: 'Dunn's sturdy, naturally civic character must come in some degree from identification with his own country, Scotland, just as Heaney's comes from a similar identification with Ireland'.[54] The parallel between the two poets' engagements makes a valid point. But when in his lecture Dunn describes Heaney as a poet who is sometimes 'distracted' by topical issues,[55] which refers to a sense of true lyricism being diluted by the poet's civilian concerns, it is hard not to take it as an explanation for some of his own motivations, too.

The various sequences into which Dunn arranges the poems of *Dante's Drum-kit* reflect different routes of disengagement. Parts I and II feature literature's association with visionary imagination as a possible way of escaping topicality, and

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[52] Bayley, 'A Poet more than Himself', 54.
[53] Douglas Dunn, *The Topical Muse: On Contemporary Poetry*, The Kenneth Allott Lectures 6, delivered on 22 March 1990 (Liverpool: Liverpool Classical Monthly, 1990), 9.
[54] Bayley, 'A Poet more than Himself', 55.
[55] Dunn, *The Topical Muse*, 8.

the same idea filters in 'Audenesques for 1960', the opening poem of Part IV. In his introduction to the reading Dunn gave with some other writers in the autumn of 2000 in Budapest, the local British Council Officer, a Scotsman, unwittingly re-named the book 'Dante's Dream-kit'. This slip of the tongue can be elucidating for us, as it does reflect on an emblematic quality of Dunn's collection. In Part I there is, indeed, an 'Australian Dream-Essay'; whereas 'Bedfordshire' describes what may be called a 'sleep-in', an imaginary dream-plot against politics; and the ironic 'Kabla Khun' contemplates the wider implications of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and the notorious visionary dream recorded in that famous poem. Dunn associates the Romantic poet's *furor* with an ambition of detachment from history. '"One time and place [...] are never enough/ For poets who love the Sublime"' (*DDK*, 12), Coleridge says in the poem, and it is instrumental to compare this with the way in *The Topical Muse* Dunn describes a sense of 'natural unwillingness', of 'not wanting to be there', in Heaney's political poems.[56] Coleridge's figure embodies for Dunn an absolute regression from the everyday into a Wordsworthian 'visionary dreariness': '"This is my home. – Inverted Lucidity's/ Surrender to everything! Dreams!"' (*DDK*, 14). Dunn distinguishes sudden lyrical perceptions, or flashes of poetic epiphany, from the '"uselessly kind/ Insights of social, familiar and fond/ Life"' (*DDK*, 15). Beyond the social corners of poetry there is a more important battleground for the poet: '"It's the life of the self with another self fighting"' (*DDK*, 15). 'Bagni di Lucca', of the same sequence, is also aimed at defending the liberty of the self, though not militantly, but by taking the route of 'visionary spirituality', the world of 'shadows' (*DDK*, 21). At the same time, the exclamation '*O bella libertà! O bella!*' (*DDK*, 24) at the end plays off against each other the personal and public echoes of our notions

[56] Ibid.

associated with the word 'liberty'. If both poems have been inspired by a perception of literature as a selfish act as opposed to being a playing-field of common interest, in 'Disenchantments' (which makes up the whole of Part II of the book) Dunn puts this inspiration into practice when in the form of a literary autobiography he aims to establish and defend the sovereignty of his writing as an extension of his own personality.

'Audenesques for 1960' in Part IV of the book continues the same theme in that it evokes Dunn's youthful 'Day-dream tutorials' (*DDK*, 91), his imaginary conversations with Auden. Unlike Auden, Bayley suggests, Dunn 'grew up in his craft as a naturally committed poet, one for whom society as it was existed'.[57] But the nineties may have seen a diminishment of this 'natural' commitment. We may point out the contrast between the inner turmoil of the soul with its mystical insights and the detached external view of 'undramatic streets' in 'Reading Pascal in the Lowlands' as the inception of his split with public concerns in favour of transpolitical universals. What Bayley calls the 'unmistakable civic virtue'[58] of Dunn is still present in *Dante's Drum-kit*, but privacy is seen as an increasingly valuable quality of life, in which the literary (re)creation of the self plays a major part. In 'Audenesques for 1960' Dunn rejects the idea of literature participating in, or influenced by, political affairs on a larger scale: 'imagination side-steps/ Half-witted nagging about "National Identity"' (*DDK*, 91). 'Poetry's a bigger, more comprehensive fact of human necessity than the exercise of the psychic mannerisms of nationality', he said in an earlier interview.[59] The poem's concluding image sets in opposition national predicaments with the quiet aestheticism of poetry. But while in

[57] Bayley, 'A Poet more than Himself', 55.
[58] Ibid., 54.
[59] O'Donoghue, 'An Interview with Douglas Dunn', 45.

*Northlight* aesthetics infuses perceptions of history, now the serenity of the natural landscape seems to imply meditation being a form of quiet dismissal, or an individual epiphany:

> It's a Scottish night. I look at the still Firth.
> Avuncular and kindly wordless calm
> Shines on the aesthetically mooned water.
> (*DDK*, 91)

Dunn's translations in the same period provide further illustration for his writing shying away from social reality. His translations from the work of the contemporary Polish poet Piotr Sommer, surprisingly, relate more closely to the political past than to the present of Dunn's poetry. While Sommer is an engaged East-European poet (which is normally a tautology), the individual poems translated by Dunn point backwards rather than forward within his own career. 'Far from the quarrels of the capital,/ they know what to think./ There are always landscapes on their doorstep:/ woods, a river, puffy pancakes of cloud' – the image in these lines from Sommer's 'This is certain'[60] could easily be the description of the Tayside landscape on Dunn's own doorstep as it appears in *Northlight*, or a reflection on his 'provincialism' in 'Here and There' or 'Remembering Lunch'. On the other hand, Sommer's 'A bit more effort, please', though also tainted with national issues, links up with the clandestine work of self-education in 'The Student' from *Barbarians*:

> We shall all further our education,
>
> go from the desk
> to the toilet, with a book
> and a pencil, mark and memorise,

[60] Piotr Sommer, 'This is certain', in *Things to Translate and Other Poems*, trans. by Douglas Dunn et al. (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 1991), 44.

and come back so the boss
won't notice, until we become
one of the best-educated
nations in Central Europe.[61]

Dunn builds a network of literary references in *Dante's Drum-kit*, playfully creating a poetic alphabet of classics (from Auden, the Brownings, Coleridge and Dante to Wordsworth), and makes an extensive use of a classical genre such as the pastoral. But his doubt about his own authoritative cultural position (attained irrevocably as a result of the popular success and the critical acclaim surrounding *Elegies* especially) comes to surface in various and direct ways. He is a confident user of *terza rima*, but when he describes it as stolen and his use of it as 'parodic' in 'Disenchantments' (*DDK*, 37), it surely signifies his inability to identify with certain features of poetry traditionally associated with the domain of 'serious' or 'high' literature. But in the same poem he associates the thirteenth-century rhyme scheme with the 'sentient metre' of metrical verse and a 'decent poetry' (which is surely the side he takes), whereas 'those intent on being "of the Age"/ Doodle devoutly in a Bolshevik// Modernist manner's nervous prose' (*DDK*, 38). However, when he describes his place in a poet's paradise in the manner of the class-conscious poems of *Barbarians*, it reveals that he is not comfortable in the company of Dante and the likes, just as 'Audenesques for 1960' brings up the inheritance of class and accent-based cultural inferiority.

The in-between cultural position Dunn assumes in *Dante's Drum-kit* creates a useful space for him in which he can freely express his disbelief in history, but it ultimately leads to the poeticisation of individualism. He justifies that strategy in *The Topical Muse*, which examines 'middle-generation' Irish, Scottish and English poets,

[61] Piotr Sommer, 'A bit more effort, please', in *Things to Translate and Other Poems*, trans. by Douglas Dunn et al. (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 1991), 46.

such as Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Tony Harrison, Craig Raine and Tom Leonard. Given his acknowledged affinity with most of these poets, what he writes about them largely implies his own position, too. He describes the ideal of literariness, which is often exhibited in the work of the middle generation, as one coming from necessity: 'As well as open to emotional and actual topicality, they have been obliged to reconsider language and poetic form in relation to what were anticipated by the literary and political insularity that were among the bequests of The Movement'.[62] He points out the current emphasis on identity and 'rootedness' in recent poetry, and that poets create their own space 'in which to explore the subtle and sometimes hazardous area where poetry, locality and nationality meet in the one expressive moment'.[63] This is also a good summary of his own ambition in *Northlight*; mind, though, that he identifies that endeavour as 'sometimes hazardous'. He contrasts in Heaney the 'topicality of feeling' as expressed, for example, in the sequence 'Singing School', with actual topicality, which is in fact, as Dunn says, a 'distraction' from the concerns of pure lyricism.[64] So when a poet does not want to weaken poetry with engagement or to risk the restriction which political side-taking may often impose on thematic considerations, or when he or she wants to maintain a 'relaxed disinterestedness', Dunn suggests, it will 'put the poet in a state of continuous opposition'.[65] 'While I remain convinced by "real, rather than ideological, honesty", and by its associated belief, "a reverence for the real person or event"', Dunn writes, 'I subscribe to the conviction that it is these specific qualities [that] make "opposition" inevitable'.[66] The oppositional nature of poetry, he seems to

[62] Dunn, *The Topical Muse*, 3.
[63] Ibid., 4.
[64] Ibid., 8.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., 8-9.

imply, even though it is aimed at the inclusiveness of the experience, will lead to some sense of exclusion. It is precisely this sense of the poet's individualism, or individual salvation, which Bayley castigates in modern poetry. He points out 'the opposition of the spirit' at work in Mahon's writing, especially in 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford', one of his favourite poems, which he describes as an act of 'lyrical spokesmanship on behalf of "the weak souls"'.[67] The problem with this spokesmanship seems to be that it can be elegiac at best, but never life-changing in a revolutionary way. Dunn says, 'Mahon's poetry offers a lyrical critique of materialism'.[68] But then neither revolutions nor *Realpolitik* usually stem from idealism, or at least it is best when they do not. He analyses Leonard's 'social critique of the language' in the phonetically transcribed working-class poems of *Unrelated Incidents*, but not in terms of offering a possible, more tangible as well as more directly social, alternative to Mahon's spiritualised social criticism.[69] He recommends, though, the role of the social critic for the poet in his conclusion, but again the illustration he chooses from Craig Raine, from the poem 'A Walk in the Country', remains within the confines of a private, domesticated version of salvation rather than offering the chance of a redemption anchored in a common cause or in collective experience.

The most significant form of expression of Dunn's individualism in *Dante's Drum-kit* is the pastoral, which, together with the theme of domesticity, gives the backbone of Part IV. 'Preserve and Renovate' has some pastoral references (picturing a lawn 'Fit for a naked nymph to dance upon', *DDK*, 95), but it is essentially 'Garden Hints' which continues the similar concerns of *Northlight*. That

[67] Ibid., 10.
[68] Ibid., 11.
[69] Ibid., 14.

poem's vocabulary plays up some of the obligatory attributes of the pastoral: harvest, husbandry, rites, labour and virtue. He even features some Latin: *hortus* for 'garden', which is not just another example of his interest in lexical estrangement, but also chimes with 'Horatius', the original, Latin form of the poet Horace's name. Dunn is a dedicated gardener, and tending the natural environment has an important motivation in his poetry. His approach to horticulture is very different from Heaney's relationship with field work: rather than merely tied up with the responsibility of the poet, domestic labour interests Dunn for its promise of enjoyment and privacy at least as importantly as for providing a perspective of moralism and social criticism. If 'Ratatouille' in *Northlight* is a recipe, then 'Garden Hints' reads like a gardening manual, though Dunn's first advice is of course strongly allegorical:

> Plant sheltering trees or build a wall
> In keeping with the fabric of your parish.
> (*DDK*, 106)

While they can be read as a paraphrase of the 'republican, pagan paradise' he writes about in 'Disenchantments', these lines also suggest a degree of conformity with, as well as a resolute act of isolation from, society. The same lines also invoke some of the class-based connotations of the wall motif from *Barbarians*.

For Dunn, like food, a garden is there for taking pleasure in it. Unlike the kirky old man in 'Preserve and Renovate', he would probably not turn up his nose at a naked nymph on his lawn. But it is certainly not just pure hedonism, for his version of the pastoral displays love, tolerance and sympathy:

> Make it a work of love, a work of man
> Befriended by the sociable and true,
> Where children leave their toys, and wives their books.
> (*DDK*, 108)

'Garden Hints' identifies 'domestic devotion' as 'the point of life', which historians tend to bypass (*DDK*, 106). But this familiar environment, too, has its own small mysteries in the form of some imaginary pagan deities who protect 'Days of loveliness' (*DDK*, 109). Even if we consider his disbelief in Providence and that he regards himself as an atheist poet, it is hard to describe Dunn as one, especially when he puts deliberate emphasis on spiritualism and everyday existence complementing each other: 'Although domestic,/ Still keep a patch for mystery' (*DDK*, 109). With no trace of an awareness of a menacing world outside as earlier, the garden is an Arcadian microcosm, which gives chance for a peaceful Horatian retreat, also with a hint at a modest faculty for *carpe diem*: 'you'll be happier with the present tense' (*DDK*, 106). The garden is a world of love, defined by the presence of nurturing femininity: 'Women who garden tend to leave their love/ Wherever their gloved work's been done' (*DDK*, 107). Dunn's representation of women is infused with a benevolent man's sympathy for things feminine. Just as love is a form of partnership, he refuses to see nature as something that can be possessed: 'Who, anyway, can own a tree, a flower,/ Visiting butterflies, or a blade of grass?' (*DDK*, 108). Having built a wall around it, what appears at first to be an expression of ownership turns to be partnership with the environment, which has a broader effect on his political ideals. The poem's epigrammatic conclusion, which chimes with the closing line of 'A Removal from Terry Street', encourages unselfishness and the ability to take delight in nature:

> And if you have a lawn,
> Let it be grass kept sweet for walking on.
> (*DDK*, 109)

In *Dante's Drum-kit* pastoral idealism becomes associated with the commonplace, which has MacCaig as one of its great proponents in modern Scottish poetry. Not unlike in MacCaig, the ordinary is often the location of small miracles, as in 'Saturday's Rainbow', where light transforms into art, driven 'Beyond the commonplace, towards perfection' (*DDK*, 113). Dunn domesticates this visual epiphany by describing it through the window of his living-room. Unlike earlier in his poetry, particularly in *Terry Street* and *Elegies*, where the commonplace was often used to hint at unknown secrets and correspondences which point beyond immediate perceptions of reality, now it becomes the pledge of belief in the value and significance of everyday life as we see it. 'Early Autumn' describes the metaphysical leap which is inherent in, or can be reconstructed from, the attributes of everyday reality:

> Something begins in me, but I don't know
> What it is yet. I shall try to find out.
> It could be some sort of inhuman benevolence
> Made of moth-powder, wings, smoke and soap.
> (*DDK*, 98)

There is often a sense of Franciscan tribute to things ordinary, or of the capability to discover the transcendental in the quotidian. Dunn's approach to the commonplace could even be termed a civil religion (though it may be unsafe to relate the word 'religion', in its orthodox sense, to his poetry), while it is worthwhile to note in the lines cited above that tender paganism of insect life which is perhaps a small homage to Shakespeare's world of fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 'Just Standing

There' takes a similar course from the starting image ('It's a wooden bridge, an ordinary bridge,/ A small one, on which I've stood many times', *DDK*, 100) to the moment of lyrical insight, taking the idea of 'Early Autumn' a step further:

> It's not the stream or the bridge; it's where I stand
> At a precise spot of nowhere and timelessness
> Within myself, a door I can go through and be invisible
> In a room also invisible or from which I come back
> Without memory other than the languageless noise in the ears
> Such as can be recalled clearly but never spoken.
> (*DDK*, 101)

There is a sense of Romantic self-centredness in these lines, but certainly no vestige of the Wordsworthian claim to the poet's absolute capacity for the retrieval of old feelings and impressions.

Dunn presents a different perception of the commonplace in 'To My Desk', a warmly ironic aggrandisement of a lifeless object, which to a certain extent repeats the theme of 'Ode to a Paperclip' in *St Kilda's Parliament*. He addresses the desk as a living person, a 'wooden friend' (*DDK*, 111). It is also imagined as a country, a place with its own archaeology and an underworld of sewers, catacombs and dungeons, which occasion a parodic aside to Heaney: 'I could dig into that, but won't' (*DDK*, 111). The desk is smudged with the 'Civilian elbow-grease' of Dunn's Presbyterian work ethic, but is also a place for emotions: 'I have laughed and cried over you' (*DDK*, 111). The poem concludes on the note of partnership, which implies the dismissal of a hierarchic distinction between man and the inanimate world, a gesture probably not unrelated to MacCaig's 'Zen Calvinism'. But rather than merely drawing on MacCaig, this worldview has a deep root in Dunn's lyricism, which may be related to the experience that formed the background of *Elegies*. He couples benevolence and the commonplace in the brilliant 'Henry Petroski, *The*

*Pencil. A History.* Faber and Faber, £14.99', a book review in verse, originally published in the review pages of the *Glasgow Herald.*[70] 'Libraries. A Celebration', a 'retrospective ode' with a self-consciously anachronistic rhetoric, is another commonplace poem that ends on the note of affection. It does not lack a sense of mischievous humour ('puncturing day-dreaming silence,/ Dropping the dead-weight of Webster's *Dictionary*/ Flat to the floorboards from the height of my chest', *DDK*, 19), and he includes an anecdote about Larkin the Librarian, as well as an allusion to the 'instinctive scholarship' theme known from 'The Student'. The commonplace incites Dunn's ability to notice, and willingness to spend time with, quite simple everyday charms, as in the invitingly matter-of-fact 'February 1988', the eleventh piece of 'Sketches':

> At a rained-on service station, drivers stop
> To fill their tanks, and, pouring petrol, stare
> With one eye at a boiler-suited girl
> Who, at her till, ties ribbons in her hair.
> (*DDK*, 119)

Hedonism is another signifier of Dunn's dissent from both poetry's extrovert concerns and the often repressive Presbyterian heritage that is still associated with Scottish culture and Scottish life. In *Dante's Drum-kit* hedonism involves an appreciation of the natural environment, but, in equal measure, it is also related to the joys of food. Although there is a slight hint at the displacement of fruits in 'Spanish Oranges' in the language they 'speak', actually there develops an international dialogue with no indication of estrangement: 'Polyglot answers, *Si*'s/ Taste of *OK*/ And a kissed, citric *Oui*'s/ Orange hooray' (*DDK*, 104). The poet-persona indulges in

[70] Douglas Dunn, 'Henry Petroski, *The Pencil. A History.* Faber and Faber, £14.99', *Glasgow Herald*, 17 November 1990, p. 24.

the harvest of southern weather, and imagines fruit-ripening sunshine while tasting an orange, which is described with affectionate irony as 'Round fruit of the planet' (*DDK*, 105). The poem obviously goes beyond a sheer indulgence in sensuality in that the ordinary fruit becomes the token of life's delights:

> Number them all, such fruits
> Savour of life,
> Love and the place of it, roots,
> Children and wife.
> (*DDK*, 105)

'Extra Helpings' is another (self-satirical) poem about hedonism. In fact, it enlarges the pleasures of eating into a Gargantuan scale of gluttony: 'all good things/ Await to be guzzled until I am happy and full' (*DDK*, 93). The food is different too: as opposed to southern delicacies, here the objects of desire are home-grown groceries like turnip and cabbage. None of them too attractive, but one, significantly, is a kind of root, with all the connotations of this word, while the other, the 'kail', is an innate emblem in Scottish literature – and he clears them all. 'Extra Helpings' is a very successful poem, metrically speaking: its clear sense of rhythm and rhyme (*aabccb ddee*), together with the song-like refrains, makes the lines roll like the dumplings he gobbles. The reader may catch the acoustic of spoken language in the poem's engaging conversational and anecdotal register:

> I used to be slim.
> I used to be *slim*!
> 'Look!' they say now. 'There's at least *three* of him!'
> To which I reply
> With a daggerly eye,
> 'Well, that's better than three-quarters *you*!'
> (*DDK*, 93)

A deeply felt affinity with, and respect for, femininity is another form of dissent in the decisively masculine tradition that defined Scottish poetry until very recently. This comes to surface in Dunn's associating himself with some conventionally feminine domains including cooking, gardening, domesticity and the proximity of children. As it springs from respect and sympathy as well as from wider cultural considerations, there is no condescension or irony in his poetic 'feminism'. He justifies his approach in the essay 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Literature' by saying that 'Feminist criticism, it seems to me, is not just "best left to women"'.[71] It might well be the case that his poetry moves away from a historical synthesis in the direction of a gender-related synthesis of culture, at least that is what his pressing of an alternative sensibility in Scottish literature seems to suggest:

> In Scottish literature, I feel [...] that the true responsibility is to save it from itself, from damaging cultural, social and political pressures. Prominent among these is a range of characteristic attitudes to women.[72]

He gives a survey of the prominent female characters in the history of Scottish literature, and the enumeration does not take up very much space in the end. He maintains that the most famous Scottish works, such as 'Tam o' Shanter', *Treasure Island* and *Peter Pan*, are in fact 'adventure stories for boys'.[73] But while, he says, contemporary literature is more 'self-aware' in questions of gender, some male writers like Kelman and McIlvanney 'still seem trapped by inherited psychologies' of masculinity.[74] When Dunn sees the necessity of setting up an alternative value system which reflects and draws on a benevolent and inclusive humanism, it may

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[71] Douglas Dunn, 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Literature', *Scotlands*, 1 (1994), 1-23 (p. 1).
[72] Ibid., 2.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 22.

well be his only reference to the collective salvation literature holds for us. But, again, it is less taken up by social concerns than by the respect and defence of universal values:

> Poetry, fiction and drama have their moods of prohibition and repudiation, but it is rare that any of them should reject itself. That, however, is on offer when a culture overrates its nationalism at the expense of curative and benign human relationships.[75]

Finally, nature lyric can be pinned down as a strategy of disengagement in *Dante's Drum-kit*. Dunn describes nature as an autonomous being that exists outside society, and consequently outside the vain pretensions of human ownership. Nature is also something whose otherness has to be recognised. Most obviously in 'Early Autumn', in his ambition to create partnership with nature he relies on the same type of iconography made up of the view of the firth, water and light effects as in the historical synthesis of *Northlight*. In 'Weeding a Border' he provides an alternative typology for Scottish poetic tradition: 'Forget our scientists, inventors [...]/ We are a people of expeditionary botanists' (*DDK*, 59). He speaks for the love of vegetation and natural environment, and it links up with the love of life and a capacity to indulge in pleasures in a culture which has a long tradition of repressing joy. Importantly, the pastoral environment inspires him to find his own private version of politics, which is benign, gentle and is infused by a republican sentiment:

> Perfect carrots, the cold-frame, beetroot, lettuce,
> Potatoes, and glamorous Byzantine gladioli,
> These, too, are native, and express the way
> A country's drawn to pleasure, as do also
> Delicate sweetpeas, succulent runner-beans.

[75] Ibid., 23.

> – *Respublica; république; la chose publique*:
> Difficult issues steeped in mellow life's
> Agreeable distractions, our words causing
> Stammering embarrassment, unable to prise free
> Beauty, bird-song, preferable politics.
> (*DDK*, 59)

Nature is included in and defines his solitary republicanism: 'Here is my hedgerowed State,/ My stubble republic', he writes in 'Settlements', which is Part X of the sequence 'Sketches' (*DDK*, 118). 'Just Standing There' points both forward and backwards in his poetic work: it links back to *Northlight* inasmuch as standing at a point in nowhere and timelessness becomes a significant moment, and foreshadows *The Year's Afternoon*, where beauty is found in the everyday reality of a small-scale landscape, as opposed to the broad view of the Firth of Tay. The poem rehearses a development of the general idea in *Northlight* as long as he does not try to establish any deliberate bonds between the land and the social lives of the people inhabiting it. He aspires towards a reciprocal relationship with the land rather than imposing ownership on the natural environment. The poem's dynamic leads from the thought of ownership ('It is my bridge') to a version of 'the topicality of feeling' that he describes in *The Topical Muse*: 'Nothing like this is mine, it tells me./ [...] Reality is yours, and your spirit is your own' (*DDK*, 101). The uncollected 'Hothouse February', which is in a sense an eco-poem, proposes a similar partnership with animal creatures: 'This land is ours and yours'.[76]

In general terms, Dunn does not find a means to replace the broken synthesis of history and personal time in *Dante's Drum-kit*. Landscape and lyricism create a pastoral decadence which turns into a form of escapism from society. Eventually, he

[76] Douglas Dunn, 'Hothouse February', in *The Orange Dove of Fiji: Poems for the World Wide Fund for Nature*, ed. by Simon Rae (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 30.

becomes the poet of privacy who celebrates domesticity and the ordinary world with its modest wonders, though partnership with the pastoral environment serves moral purposes in that nature shows the way to a 'preferable politics'. It is arguable to what extent this is simply political idealism, and how uninvolved he remains in spite of the political poems we find in *Dante's Drum-kit* and the public commitment manifested in his anthologies. The idea of partnership (as opposed to ownership) undermines, in a sense, the social basis of engagement. When he declines to use the word 'my' in the context of nationality in *Scotland: An Anthology*, it may well be a sign of resignation. On the whole, though, it has to be admitted that the perception of the nation motivated by partnership with nature leads to a permissive and potentially less dangerous definition of nationality. Dunn does not regard history as an open field of possibilities for the poet, but rather as a predicament into which he or she is thrown, and which hardly leaves room for poetic independence. Politics, then, is an affront to creative liberties, which in turn may result in nostalgia for a full imaginative freedom. Instead of a simple political engagement, he endorses the 'topicality of feeling', which may be a synonym of spiritual republicanism. His poetry seems to linger not between the supposedly opposite impetuses of aestheticism and public commitment, but between different perceptions of politics: seeing it as something bothersome and avoidable, or acknowledging its necessity for literature and recognising it as a part of his own sensibility. These two impetuses actually meet in the subjectivity of the poet, as I argue later. But at this point Dunn is likely to get involved in politics only when its actions endanger the territory of privacy. *Dante's Drum-kit* puts poetry to the test by locating it in the centre of these pulling forces, but explores a dilemma which is less about the different uses of poetry than a lyrical poet's 'quotidian self-defence'[77] against history.

[77] Dunn, 'Disenchantments' (*DDK*, 34).

# Chapter Six

## The Anatomy of Solitude

### Public art and the poetics of outdoors in *The Donkey's Ears* and *The Year's Afternoon*

Having been criticised for what seems to be indecision about the political engagement and the private concerns of poetry, Dunn apparently arrives at consistency when he treats these subjects separately in his two latest books. Following *Dante's Drum-kit* after seven years, *The Donkey's Ears* and *The Year's Afternoon* appeared in 2000. He composed the earliest poems in *The Year's Afternoon* around 1993, but some of its most definitive pieces, such as 'Early Hours in Dairsie' and 'Indolence', are much more recent. The separation from his second wife in 1998 and his subsequent relocation to Dairsie, a small village near St Andrews, contribute to the keynote of loneliness in this collection, and effect a transition of poetic landscapes from the expansive coastal views of the Tay to inland settings and the even more intimate surroundings of the garden. Part One of *The Donkey's Ears* was originally commissioned for an exhibition on the Dogger Bank Incident in the Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, and was published in 1983,[1] but Dunn did not return to working on it before 1997. Adopting the practice of his own hero, he wrote at night-time, and finished the book during a sabbatical leave from the School of English in 1999-2000. In this chapter I will investigate the ways in which the seemingly incongruous public and aesthetic concerns of poetry intersect in the lyrical subject, while these recent books reaffirm the

[1] Douglas Dunn, 'Politovsky's Letters Home', *Encounter*, 61 (1983), 50-51.

poet's extra-societal position, but also remain alert to the social and historical determinants of poetry.

*The Donkey's Ears* takes its subject matter from history, from the Russo-Japanese War, when the Russian fleet sailed around the globe to perish in the 1905 battle of Tsushima, known as 'the Trafalgar of the East'. Dunn's concept is based on the posthumous edition of Flag-Engineer E. S. Politovsky's letters to his wife, Sophie, while also drawing on various other documents.[2] History, then, is both a supply of raw materials and inspiration for Dunn. But fiction gets in when the officer is made into a 'secret poet' torn between duty and love, boilers and verse. He contemplates from Politovsky's exilic viewpoint tsarist Russia's imperialist expansion, and, in more general terms, reflects on the predicament of man trapped in politics from an ethical perspective that converts documentary fiction into epic poetry:

> I either lose myself or start to die
> Or see The Engineer as metaphor
>
> Depicting patriotism or a straight
> Obedience to the facts of what we do,
> And where we are, and where we're going to...
> (*DE*, 79)

While facts and data on the Russian navy abound, and Dunn obviously derives great pleasure from that too, the poem is primarily an expansive meditation on history that 'forgives// Nothing and no one' (*DE*, 73). In this sense *The Donkey's Ears* may be a rewrite of *Europa's Lover*, and provides him with an opportunity to talk about (beyond Europe and Christendom) Asia, the African French colonies, Russia, China and the crossing of two oceans. Internationalism is not just a clever device, but almost seems to

[2] For Dunn's sources, see: 'Author's Note' (*DE*, 173-76).

become an obsession on his part. He makes certain never to miss an occasion to play up the cosmopolitan education of his hero, who seems to have communicated with his mother exclusively in German. This practice of cultural extroversion that is typically known from Tolstoy's novels in Russian literature, together with an ideological location in the work of classic Russian writers such as Pushkin and Chekhov, I suggest, makes the poem's atmosphere potentially appealing for a Central-Eastern European readership.

Dunn presents history and its consequences as the individual's unavoidable fate: 'time's the mystery in which we're caught', Politovsky says (*DE*, 9). Although there are no overt allusions to it, Admiral Rozhestvensky's character seems to embody this sense of predestination. While his strategy, if he has one, remains a mystery to all, the Admiral leads his fleet like a Moses (now reluctantly, then viciously scourging his men) to meet an inescapable and apparently pointless destiny, and takes neither advice nor criticism from his officers. Dunn's fatalism does not owe a debt to Scottish Calvinism, which is technically his religious inheritance, and even less so to the literary tradition of ancient Greek tragedy, inasmuch as his judgement of history is generally dissociated both from Providence and any other source of metaphysical power. One of the poem's central metaphors, 'The Engineer', may provide the key to a better understanding of his concept of pre-ordination. Relating this metaphor to deism would stand to reason, but that Politovsky himself is an atheist and that the narrative is left unfinished (it ends before the long-anticipated naval conflict) suggest instead a purposeless view of history. Given that Politovsky died in the battle, obviously Dunn could not get him to account for what otherwise would have been the climax to the story. Existence feels like being eternally postponed to an unidentifiable but probably disastrous hereafter as the Russian fleet sails from port to port, its élan dissipates and

men die. The build-up of tension collapses without a climax or solution: 'The probable shrinks// Into the likely, into the future/ [...] where/ Prognoses end up empty as hot air' (*DE*, 137). The narrative is interrupted rather than left open, and so the only type of permanence that is promised here is the senseless repetition of history, voiced earlier in *Dante's Drum-kit*.

Dunn acknowledges that he modelled *The Donkey's Ears*, as he says, on 'the hellish century which is about to become another century, indeed, a new millennium'.[3] His retrospective omniscience in the 1990s provides his hero, in whose narration the Russian naval odyssey acquires a 'foretaste of apocalypse' (*DE*, 1), with a strange prophetic wisdom at the dawn of the twentieth century. Politovsky's anticipation of his own fate ('I might not survive/ This', *DE*, 73) expands into a foreknowledge of universal tragedy, of two world wars and a cold war, as the fleet approaches the menacing conclusion of its journey, taking the northward direction: 'It will grow cold./ And men and boys will shiver and grow old' (*DE*, 166). For Politovsky the spirit of the new century is one with modernisation but Dunn's deeply rooted scepticism about technological progress and change in general often comes to the surface in the form of an apocalyptic revelation. Politovsky's great, closing prophecy about Europe, that it 'will suffer this century/ As no other' (*DE*, 172), is more than the forecast of a military engineer who has a clear concept of developed warfare's consequences. Although Politovsky's premonition that progress will bring forth more effective means of mass destruction ('modern skills/ Which God – if there was one – would prohibit', *DE*, 76) may seem to come from rational consideration rather than from pessimism, in truth it reveals Dunn's reservation about mankind's potential for moral improvement. He takes

[3] Dósa, 'A Different Drummer', 34.

stock of modern history and finds it sick, but makes his protagonist pray to time, not to God, for the healing of it (*DE*, 137). The anxiety following from the loss of belief in Providence gains metaphoric representation in the episode of the incurable sickness that affects the fleet while anchoring in aptly named Helville (*DE*, 49-50). Therefore it may be argued that this existential self-alienation, the malady of the new century, lies behind technological progress, and is the true cause of the hardly classifiable restlessness which drives the fleet forward:

> So far, so far to sail. And then, for what?
> I think it is the century compels us.
> An antique nineteenth century expels us
> And time's the mystery in which we're caught.
> (*DE*, 9)

Dunn replaced the original title, 'Politovsky's Letters Home', with *The Donkey's Ears.* That is what Tsushima means in Japanese, referring to the twin peaks on the islands, while, obviously, it also hints at his low esteem of what the last century was made into. He sets duty's sobriety against the senselessness of modern history, because it seems to be the only means by which one may gain a victory, morally at least, over inescapable historical time, prepared to go down, as Politovsky does, in a pressed uniform.

As opposed to the professional soldier's dignity, *The Year's Afternoon* involves a disenchanted and essentially civilian lyrical self. Apart from its not invariably beneficial technological advance, the twentieth century for Dunn is the age of the Holocaust and various forms of dictatorship as well as exile, unfreedom, cultural policing and consumerism. More than just 'showing the donkey's ears', he expresses a profound contempt of it in the bizarre exhibition rooms of 'Art is Wonderful', which witnesses the abattoir century in a poetry of 'sweat, ordure and decomposition' (*YA*, 24). But there is no trace of nihilism in Dunn's worldview. Stripping us off

imaginatively before entering this virtual art gallery, he makes his readers more exposed to various forms of pain and suffering, and moreover, through this symbolic though all the more self-assured gesture of humiliation he renders the tragedies of history, which just too often turn into elusive fictions that happen elsewhere or at another time, a tangible and immediate experience:

> In spaces between silent anthems, you'll hear
> Solitary shots in the back of the neck
> And the consciences of conscripts in firing squads.
> (*YA*, 23)

Although he warns us against trying to seek refuge from history in art when he reminds us that there are 'no second chances' (*YA*, 25), the poem provides an affirmative testimony of literature, which is embodied in perhaps a hint too conventional, Keatsian *ars poetica*:

> It is up to you what you choose.
> Why do you need to ask? LIBERTY. ART.
> BEAUTY. TRUTH. They're all lying to hand.
> (*YA*, 24)

In contrast with his apparently unconditional belief in the Platonic twin-ideas of beauty and truth, he is rather graphic about the proneness of public art to corruption and its vulnerability to commerce, political demagogy and other forms of dishonesty. For all that, he does not renounce the potential of literature's political signification: the affirmation of art's critical function is realised in the act of writing the poem, which, with its disturbing imagery, is intensely provocative and unsettling, and will haunt any reader for a long time.

Even though he dissociates historical time from humanism and benign individualism, Dunn takes his notion of literature's collective function to a conclusive stage in 'A European Dream'. The fact that this poem about his sincere commitment to the spiritual burden of the last century directly follows the opening 'The Year's Afternoon', which celebrates the introvert joys of temporary freedom from the civic responsibility of a daily job as well as from the abstract weight of history, should direct our attention to his increasingly complex perception of the relationship between the political and aesthetic purposes of literature that also characterises this collection. The poem's title harks back, in a public context, to the epigraph of 'A House in the Country' in *Northlight*, which is taken from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: 'I could be bounded in a nut-shell, and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams' (*N*, 38). Dunn seems to imply in this poem that not one contemporary poet can afford turning his or her back on unhelpful time, or what he calls the 'historical compost' of the twentieth century (*YA*, 7). It is interesting to observe that his concept of European history seems to be bound up with the Continent much more intimately than with Britain, and bears a heavy Polish accent, 'the passion of Slavonic eloquence' (*YA*, 6). Some stations in the series of visits he made to Venice, Prague, Vienna, Budapest and Warsaw in 1999-2000 preceded the publication of *The Donkey's Ears* and *The Year's Afternoon*. These travels have probably contributed to his growing interest in the work of some Central-Eastern European writers who are now beginning to be recognised in Britain. The emotionally motivated Europeanness that, in the form of endless catalogues, seemed to function principally as a technical underpinning of his bravura performance in *Europa's Lover*, has now become an earnest preoccupation, and acquired a deep philosophical and ethical resonance, which probably also owes much to the critical orientation of his distinguished career as a reviewer for the *New*

*Statesman*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Glasgow Herald* during the 1970s and 1980s. And although he has suffered neither war deportation nor censorship, nor exile under political oppression, his own alignment with the politics of Mandelshtam or Neruda still feels earned to an Eastern European reader, because his resentment is heartfelt and his humanism is sincere:

> my suit made by Stewart and Christie of Edinburgh
> Ripped into the rags of one hungering for want, torn by
> Hunger for hunger and a loud curse on all comfort,
> Hunger for lyrical anger, for righteous indignation,
> Vituperative and lonely in the forests of hopelessness.
> (*YA*, 8)

It remains a question, though, if, for all its allusions to Scots pedlars and mercenaries or Border tweeds ('three piece', *YA*, 7), this poem importantly joins Scotland to a cultural idea of Europe, apart from perhaps by the roundabout way of the lyrical observer's identity. The success of 'A European Dream' lies rather in Dunn's commitment to bring the 'unmeasured stories' of the victims of history right to his reader's doorstep. His unsparing directness feels like a self-performed open-heart surgery, and the spiritual solidarity of *Europa's Lover* clearly reverberates in the magnified but still very familiar image of human disaster and universal grief that he presents in the poem's conclusion:

> 'Goodbye', I said to myself, parting company with
> My own certainties, my body, my name, my language.
> It is disagreeable, to tend your garden, on your knees,
> With the sensation of tending millions of graves.
> (*YA*, 8)

Dunn's angry social criticism in *Dante's Drum-kit* and the tenacious antagonism towards the abuses of human dignity that we find in these two poems of *The Year's Afternoon* softens into the common man's helpless indignation in *The Donkey's Ears*. Politovsky, the self-made professional, does not miss an opportunity to express his irritation at the dilettantish aristocrats among the naval officers: 'They're "well connected", but intelligence/ They somehow failed to contact' (*DE*, 34). Generally, he launches criticism against the 'Romanov incompetence' (*DE*, 51) that cannot organise and finance a campaign efficiently, and condemns the obsolete ships, the 'sweltering scrapheaps' of the Russian armada (*DE*, 58). But then no one reads Politovsky's secret verse, apart from his servant Golovko, who on one occasion accidentally glances in his papers. Russian development seems to be a contradiction in terms: you either 'Russianize' or 'modernize' a navy, as Politovsky suggests (*DE*, 52). While he is 'drawn' to liberty – 'And keep this secret' (*DE*, 31) –, our engineer is more of a reformer than a revolutionary spirit, and by no means a saboteur, which would certainly contradict his willingly undertaken responsibility. The poem considers the great dilemma between the unconditional love of 'Mother Russia' and the hatred of her backwardness with exceptional insight. From at least Tolstoy onwards, as we know, in Russian literature self-knowledge is caught up with the country's destiny, which Dunn graphically expresses in one of Politovsky's lyrical soliloquies:

> To find a glimpse of who I am, or what,
> I'll have to swallow Russia and the sea.
> (*DE*, 103)

In lines like these Dunn is on the brink of becoming an Eastern writer in spirit, one who is used to patrolling that hard-to-identify border between the I and the non-I, the shared fate of self and community, which is a phenomenon rarely found in Western European

literature. Beyond a critique of political actuality, he promotes the respect of freedom and human rights, as well as comradeship, in *The Donkey's Ears*. Politovsky's humanism and unaffected solidarity with the common man probably finds its most touching expression in the stoker's episode in Part Four (*DE*, 35-36), which, moreover, expands into a social elegy on unacknowledged workmanship, and conjures up some of Dunn's motives in *Barbarians*.

For most of the time, however, Dunn's lyrical self in *The Year's Afternoon* refrains from even the submissive and elegiac form of involvement in collective issues that characterises Politovsky. As stated in the opening poem, which lends the collection its title, his concerns will not cross the boundary of his 'hiding place', the 'field-sized republic' (*YA*, 4) marked out earlier in *Dante's Drum-kit*. Apart from his historical meditations in 'A European Dream' and 'Art is Wonderful', social criticism is realised indirectly at best, in the act of his pastoral withdrawal from society. The political programme of this book, then, appears to be solidly detached from the lesson of Politovsky's story. Even though he voices his opinion about the pointlessness of their mission throughout the narrative, in the end the Flag-Engineer does not hesitate to give his life with dignity for the common cause. In the poem '1996' a ventilator fan, a 'piece of grit' that 'adds whingeing to its sucked-out smell of shit', symbolises socially involved poetry (*YA*, 20). Renouncing the same old 'stinking story' (*YA*, 20), Dunn opts for pure lyricism. The symbol of lyric poetry is a pear tree, which is hermetically sealed by a pane of glass in the poem, not quite unlike the observer persona in the socially involved 'Terry Street' sequence:

> Rhetoric, excrement. Better by far
> A peach tree's blossom in its world of window
> Which asks no questions as to why or how

> Silence suffers in its empty city where
> Stenches of grief defeat its Expelair.
> (*YA*, 20)

Dunn's choice of disengagement in his lyrical collection is apparently in contrast with the concerns of *The Donkey's Ears*. I say 'apparently' because Politovsky, like the Auden of the 'Poetry makes nothing happen' formula, is very much aware that literature may function as a form of personal redemption at most: poetry can 'diagnose but can't repair what's wrong', the engineer says (*DE*, 80). This aesthetic individualism represents the moment of disbelief in art's collective power which finally restrains Dunn from becoming a poet of the Eastern European type. When Politovsky remarks that poetry can 'cure/ Diseased time', he actually reflects on the dimension of literature's domesticated, very intimate redemptive power: 'The way a child asks, "Tell me a story!"...// The way a story answers to a child's/ Deepest interest!' (*DE*, 123). As long as writing poetry functions to deliver its protagonist from insanity in war (*DE*, 145), *The Donkey's Ears* is the hypothesis of *'Importantly Live'* put into practice. In his inaugural lecture Dunn refers to the story of a Second World War internee who tried to preserve his lucidity in a Japanese concentration camp with the help of a pencil and a piece of paper:

> Each day, month after month, he would write a few words. He used to tell his wife that recording these words saved his sanity: they identified his past and present and suggested a future. [...] He didn't write poetry. [...] But he was making marks, recording, preserving, and whether he knew it or not he was participating in a redemptive act of civilization. (*IL*, 1)

He also mentions another, similar case of appeal to the faculty of the intellect noted down by Albert Camus. And while many further examples could be drawn, the Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti's 'Letter to My Wife', which he composed shortly

before his death in a Nazi camp in 1944, remains one of the most moving and immediate expressions of an attempt to preserve sanity with the help of poetry's natural, harmonious intelligence in absurd and dangerous circumstances:

> and in these endless dangers I am appeased
> by peace of mind worth all the shouts and spears
> of wild men living turbulently, and the grave
> 2 x 2 of reason claims me in one cool wave.[4]

Dunn was probably aware of Radnóti's poem, which exists in at least two more English versions beside Edwin Morgan's translation, when he composed *The Donkey's Ears*. Politovsky's story illustrates for him the same truth as is expressed in Radnóti's 'Letter to My Wife' that while appearances and even routines defined as 'duty and knowledge' (*DE*, 74) will dissipate and let your soul go, a plea to the order embodied in poetry's balanced regularity might just save you:

> In these, my nightly stanzas, I pretend
> To solve and cure myself as each round rhyme
> Fits in a sonic sandwich and keeps time
> With life, with poetry's clocks...
> (*DE*, 75)

That Dunn reformulates the same thesis in 'Art is Wonderful' may suggest the centrality of this thought in his perception of literature. In this poem all the exhibition rooms representing the collective aspect of art are in fact the recordings of its failures, which suggests that he renounces the role of poetry as a potentially effective channel of social criticism. Room Three, for instance, is filled with nothing but an exile's sigh.

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[4] Miklós Radnóti, 'Letter to My Wife' ["Levél a hitveshez"], in Edwin Morgan, *Collected Translations* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), 450-51 (p. 451).

But finally in Room Ten Dunn invites the visitor to leave his or her mark on the walls, a gesture which may be associated with what Seamus Heaney calls the 'redress of poetry'[5]:

> They're charms against terror's arithmetic.
> They'll preserve you from stupidity.
> They'll make your life difficult, your work true.
> (*YA*, 24)

Although he is not an unequivocally political poet, Dunn does not turn down the usefulness of the social and political involvement of poetry. In his view, as I argue later, the concerns of privacy and public responsibility intersect in the interpretive mind rather than in the work of literature itself. He makes a clear-cut juxtaposition between art and life in 'Leopardi' by distinguishing truth from reality:

> What makes us say a thing is beautiful
> Or some one, too, is lovely, such as you?
> Devotion that's beyond the dutiful
> Or truth superior to the merely true –
> These, too, excite us.
> (*YA*, 41)

Far from being an isolated phenomenon in modern Scottish poetry, the same distinction lingers on in the work of the younger generation, most notably in the poetry of John

[5] Heaney writes of Simone Weil's *Gravity and Grace* that it is 'informed by the idea of counterweighting, of balancing out the forces, of redress – tilting the scales of reality towards some transcendent equilibrium. And in the activity of poetry too, there is a tendency to place a counter-reality in the scales – a reality which may be only imagined but which nevertheless has weight because it is imagined within the gravitational pull of the actual and can therefore hold its own and balance out against the historical situation. This redressing effect of poetry comes from its being a glimpsed alternative, a revelation of potential that is denied or constantly threatened by circumstances'. In: Seamus Heaney, 'The Redress of Poetry', in *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 1-16 (pp. 3-4).

Burnside, who explains separating truth from reality in his recent essay 'Strong Words'. Describing the moment of surrendering to the lyrical impetus with which Dunn is so often concerned but in a terminology that is very different from the elder poet's, Burnside suggests that the writing of poetry is a political act inasmuch as it 'expresses, not the agendas of special interest groups, but the search for an appropriate manner of dwelling upon the earth'.[6] In 'Martagon Lilies' Dunn restates the same difference by contrasting 'a piece of real' with 'a piece of true' (*YA*, 73-74). He defends his privilege to dream himself out of reality and into the 'truth' in that poem, just as in 'Leopardi' he asserts loyalty to inner truth to be a more important function of art than its social responsibilities. This motive might explain why even his commonplace poems strive for the spiritual and the lyrical. Attila József was probably the first modern poet who overtly questioned the validity of Keats's axiom about beauty and truth in his 'Welcome to Thomas Mann', an occasional poem written to honour a visit made by the German émigré writer to Budapest in 1937. József, who was a sharply political poet (even to the degree of being programmatic) *and* one of the most candidly lyrical poets of the last century, represents a more balanced view, in that he assumes that the two tendencies should supplement, rather than exclude or dominate over, one another:

> You know this well: the poet never lies,
> The real is not enough; through its disguise
> Tell us the truth which fills the mind with light
> Because, without each other, all is night.[7]

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[6] John Burnside, 'Strong Words', in *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, ed. by W. N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 2000), 259-61 (p. 261).

[7] Attila József, 'Welcome to Thomas Mann' ["Thomas Mann üdvözlése"], trans. by Vernon Watkins, in *The Colonnade of Teeth: Modern Hungarian Poetry*, ed. by George Gömöri and George Szirtes (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1996), 40-41 (p. 40).

When in 'Martagon Lilies' Dunn renounces the poet's social involvement by affirming that art carries no moral, he echoes the concept of lyricism expressed earlier in 'The Predicament of Scottish Poetry'. In that essay he argues that the impulse of truthfulness and art's freedom from educational, critical or moral intentions should be the real inspiration of both lyrical and political poetry. The true novelty in his assumption in 'Martagon Lilies' is a stressed ingredient of humility. He underplays the socially situated ego, as opposed to immaterial inspiration, in the genesis of poetry. In 'Leopardi' the atheist Dunn projects his natural share of metaphysical demand onto poetry, which, as suggested by the religious vocabulary that is supported by a moonlit and tranquil view of the 'potent Tay' (*YA*, 43), becomes a sacred art as long as it may be the site of the poet's eavesdropping on another existence. He borrows Leopardi's description of poets as 'God's spies', but without taking it in an orthodox religious context. As in *Elegies*, his religiosity is more of an alloy of quasi-pantheistic beliefs that refuses to be confined to, or aligned with, any institutional creed, and this time even becomes void of the pagan attributes of nymphs and muses that otherwise often emerge in his pastoral verse. Dunn translated Leopardi in 1987.[8] In the poem 'Leopardi' his feeling of a spiritual kinship takes shape in a declaration of literary apprenticeship to the Italian poet, who in his eyes embodies the poet's capability to surrender to the 'lyrical intellect' (*YA*, 42). In Dunn's poetics the concept of lyricism seems to have acquired an increasingly significant bond with spirituality since *Elegies*. Derek Mahon quotes Philippe Jaccottet's famous line '*l' autre monde présent peut-être dans celui-ci*' ('the other world present perhaps in this one'), which in turn echoes Éluard's maxim '*Il y a une autre réalité, mais elle est en celle-ci*' ('There is another

[8] Giacomo Leopardi, *Leopardi: A Scottish Quair*, ed. by R. D. S. Jack et al., trans. by Douglas Dunn et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1987).

reality, but it resides in this one').[9] Jaccottet's line may be illuminating at this point as the French-language poet is an acknowledged influence on Dunn, and features prominently in his 'Remembering Lunch' in *St Kilda's Parliament*. In the same way as our conscious existence is rooted in an exterior reality, in 'Leopardi' he suggests in a delicate image that spirituality is also immanent in the ordinary world around us, and that the redemptive force of lyricism lies in its capacity to bring us closer to that other reality:

> a lonely spoon's
> Reflection of a star cupped in its cup
> Like curative liquid, and a sense of art
> Which says its purpose is to raise soul up
> While also pleasing us, and breaking the heart.
> (*YA*, 43)

In 'Martagon Lilies' he draws an extended parallel between lyric poetry and Samuel Peploe's painting of the same title, which features on the cover of *The Year's Afternoon*. Thematically, the poem is an extension of *Elegies* inasmuch as it contemplates the continued presence of his deceased wife in the here and now: 'Are you legend, are you myth// To me, that you should exert such a close/ Posthumous hold over me?' (*YA*, 74). The reflective mood of 'Martagon Lilies' is supported by its lulling *abab* rhyme scheme and occasional internal rhymes as well as its calm, soft intonation, though the music of the poem breaks in on the reader with a slightly overdosed alliteration in the last line of the opening stanza: 'A wave of wonder in a world of weed' (*YA*, 73). In practical terms it may be classified as an ekphrastic poem, that is a poem about a work of art, what in Corcoran's opinion has developed into a sub-genre

[9] Derek Mahon, 'Introduction', in Philippe Jaccottet, *Selected Poems*, trans. by Derek Mahon (Winston-Salem, N. C.: Wake Forest University Press, 1988), 7-16 (p. 8).

in post-war British poetry.[10] 'Martagon Lilies' follows a neoclassical tradition by re-enacting the conventional juxtaposition of literature and painting. Being two different artistic media, verse and photography may often supplement or inspire each other, as is clear from the photographic technique applied in most of the poems in the 'Terry Street' sequence, or from the inspiration of 'St Kilda's Parliament', 'Writing with Light', 'Anon's People' and '*Bête Noire*'s Edition of *Terry Street* with Photographs by Robert Whitaker' in *The Year's Afternoon*, just to mention some of the most obvious examples. But, while they often spring from similar considerations, verse and painting cannot be reconciled in terms of their procedures and expressive potentials. In Dunn's eyes Peploe's picture is an abstraction, a sheer recording of an impression without a story or moral: 'Beauty, not meaning's what I see, a pure/ Picture of lilies in an anywhere' (*YA*, 75). At the same time, real lilies, not the picture, become a more tangible, personal symbol, the embodiments of poetic will, and with this he probably refers to the affirmative power of literature that has helped him through difficult periods in his own life. Peploe's lilies are on the brink of extinction, and seem to lose their corporeality by almost melting into a dominantly black and white background. 'They'll fade soon', Dunn writes (*YA*, 75), and by poising them on the margin of being, the flowers become a correlative of the memory of his first wife, as they link reality and spirituality, and the present and the past. He captured earlier the same moment of fading out of existence when the living turns into an idea through associating vegetative life and Peploe's art in the poem 'Rose':

> You will go into the heaven
> Of unforgotten things.

[10] Neil Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 36 n.

Matisse will paint you;
Or Samuel Peploe will.
(*SKP*, 34)

Reproducing Dunn's routine dialectical structuring, the poem builds up contrasts and then breaks them down but apparently without the ambition of creating a new synthesis. He connects, and blurs the distinction between, art and life when the picture hypnotises him into a reverie in which the remembering of Lesley, an aesthetic reflection on the Scottish Colourists, and the imagining of his botanical expedition to the Caucasus coalesce with the mosaic pieces of other reminiscences, perceptions and fantasies: 'I'm unsure/ If what I breathe is art- or lily air' (*YA*, 75). He also contrasts another Scottish painter, Fergusson's explicit sexuality with Peploe's implied and unerotic love of ethereal beauty. By turning down Fergusson's forthright representations of feminine sexuality in favour of Peploe's elusive abstractism, he reaffirms his parallel sensibility of gentle a femininity (which also includes an elegiac, incorporeal desire) in the context of an often very masculine Scottish culture. Despite his apparent rejection of certain Scottish conventions, his individualism in 'Martagon Lilies' links up with collective experience in various subtle ways. The solitary 'tweeded and booted' walks of the Scottish dominie on the Fife coast, known from *St Kilda's Parliament*, now become associated with the international dimensions of a botanical Europeanness that even reaches out to Central-Eastern Asia. Moreover, the word *album* for 'white' in the scientific designation of the lilies, *Lilium martagon album*, echoes 'Alba', the archaic name of Scotland, which in contemporary usage often implies a sentimental or backward looking context, and so confirms Dunn's routinely elegiac view of the country's existence. Though it essentially focuses on the individual, his lyric mode also creates a complex resonance with the ordinary mushrooms in Mahon's 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford', and so potentially extends

the scope and concerns of this positive energy into the public consciousness and into such lives as those of the 'Lost people of Treblinka and Pompeii'[11]:

> These are strange lilies. They survive for years
> In wooded sunlessness, and then appear
> When trees collapse, and light gets through to their
> Bulb, rhizome or stolon foodstore, and air,
> Sunlight, enough to stir them, makes them alive
> Enough to thrust a spike of purple glory
> Into oaked heat, shouting 'We can survive,
> And darkness is only part of our story!'
> (*YA*, 74)

For Dunn poetry should 'be' rather than 'mean', but he does not provide it with an autotelic function. As poetry stems not just from the soul but also from the intellect, I suggest that in his view lyricism combines historicity with the aesthetic functions of art in his ambition to preserve a belief in humanity, feeling and civilisation from being destroyed by time or history. Poetry, then, should not be considered in the context of his work as a site of conflict because of the way its reality and permanence are determined. As an aesthetic function, it is capable of accommodating timeless values but its meaningful existence is rooted in historical time. Two thematically related performances in *The Year's Afternoon*, 'Pushkin's Ring' and 'A Theory of Literary Criticism', may bring forth an understanding of his views about the dual nature of poetry. Both poems record the imagined travels of two uncommon objects, one the Russian poet's ring and the other Neruda's copy of Shakespeare's poems, through generations and around the globe. Dunn's concept borders the uncanny here, one might say, but the recent discovery of the extraordinary story of Beethoven's lock of hair

[11] Derek Mahon, 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford', in *Poems 1962-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 79-81 (p. 81).

proves the opposite. Dunn says in 'Pushkin's Ring': 'these things happen, not often,/ As Gogol said, but it's a fact, they do' (*YA*, 45). The poem is inspired by a famous incident in literary history: the death of Pushkin in a duel and the subsequent stealing of his ring that his aristocrat lover, Countess Verontsova, gave him. That Pushkin seems to have foretold his own death in *Onegin*, seems to prove for Dunn that reality may copy fiction: 'What you imagine could be true!' (*YA*, 46). By dissolving the barrier between fact and imagination, he questions the conventional matrix of interpretation and with it the secure position of the interpretive subject outside the literary work. The unpredictably changing conditions of the cognitive self in history and the use of European geography as a decorative background associate his practice in 'Pushkin's Ring' with that of *Europa's Lover*, while the poem also continues the Russian theme of *The Donkey's Ears*. Dunn's assumption is that the ring is an embodiment or extension of Pushkin's romantic sensibility, and, metonymically, becomes the bearer of pure lyricism, whereas its afterlife, its fictitious journey from Lódz, Kiev or Riga to Switzerland and Siberia, is determined by historical circumstances. His ironic aside in one of the last lines – 'Suppose *I* have it. Suppose I'm wearing it/ Right now' (*YA*, 46) –, which has a very strong effect at poetry readings, expresses his will to join, beyond Pushkin, the spiritual community of Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva and Osip Mandelshtam, poets featured as other possible inheritors of the ring. Significantly, in various ways all of these poets sacrificed their lives and their arts to the community.

'A Theory of Literary Criticism', which was written for the apolitically minded Norman MacCaig's eighty-fifth birthday celebrations, tracks down the afterlife of a literary work. The poem is about the inter-continental journey of a copy of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* that was once owned by Pablo Neruda. Dunn reviewed the

English translation of Neruda's *Extravagaria* by Alastair Reid in 1972. He saw the Chilean Nobel laureate then as 'political without being petty or crotchety or exclusive', but obviously what he admired most in him was that, as he went on to suggest, 'there is no doctrine in Neruda, only love of humanity, and the most radiantly disinterested realism'.[12] As a Communist, Neruda spent part of his life in exile, but in this poem, rather unusually for him, Dunn is less interested in the historical details, and extends the poem's concerns to investigate literature's mode of existence. Neruda's copy of Shakespeare starts to live its own independent, Protean and apparently endless, life: 'It goes like an albatross and they cannot kill it' (*YA*, 11). The albatross image could be a reference to Charles Baudelaire's sonnet 'L'Albatros', in which the bird serves as an allegory of the poet's situation, and may also be a symbol of literature's inherent transcendentalism:

> Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées
> Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer;
> Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,
> Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher.[13]

It is in fact a Platonic idea, the 'perfect replica' (*YA*, 11) of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, and not the individual copy, that survives:

> Burning purifies it. They cannot kill it.
> It runs off the printing presses; and they cannot kill it.
> They discuss it in lecture theatres but cannot kill it.
> (*YA*, 11)

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[12] Douglas Dunn, 'Poet and Politician' [a review of *Extravagaria* by Pablo Neruda], *Spectator*, 5 August 1972, p. 218.

[13] "The Poet shares the fate of this prince of the clouds, who rejoices in the tempest and mocks the archer down below: exiled on earth, an object of scorn, his giant wings impede him as he walks." In: Charles Baudelaire, 'L'Albatros', in *The Complete Verse*, ed. and trans. by Francis Scarfe (London: Anvil Press Poetry Ltd, 1986), 59.

The infinite geographical voyage of this idea, then, may be seen as a metaphor of the potentially infinite postponement of meaning as literature's primary mode of existence:

> Anything made can be unmade, but with this exception –
> If it exists, it exists, and there is the chance of eternity.
> (*YA*, 11)

But the continuous deferral of the literary work's existence into an indefinite future offers a view of literature's sovereignty, in Jaussian terms, in the ongoing dialectic of production and reception. Just as we cannot trace the whereabouts of Pushkin's ring, the elusive nature of Neruda's book seems to imply the relative insignificance of the interpretive subject in the autonomous life of literature. Dunn's 'theory' of literary criticism, then, is a product of idealist philosophy, especially when he speaks about 'keepers of verse' rather than receivers or audiences. Moreover, just as in 'Disenchantments', he shows a low opinion of critics and academics, who are members of interpretive communities by profession. Again, this seems to be an eccentric judgement, given that he is an academic himself, but it logically follows from his view of the existence of literature. As pointed out above, Dunn's poetry has often been discussed in terms of the division between the public or historical and the lyrical or timeless functions of literature. Not unlike Georg Lukács, who installs a dialectic relationship between what he calls the 'finished' and 'unfinished' nature of art in his *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst*, T. S. Eliot holds the opinion that the 'misunderstanding' of the text can be derived not only from the greater potential for semantic ambiguity in literature than in routine communication, but also from an

incongruity between the particular and the universal significance of a literary work.[14] But while Eliot defends the legitimacy of different practices of understanding, also saying that the reader may even have a better comprehension of a text than its author, Lukács, as Jauss argues, 'reclaims for aesthetics the Platonic reassurance of a timeless perfection that [...] leaves nothing for the receiver but the role of contemplative understanding'.[15] Although it is true that 'A Theory of Literary Criticism' might be seen as an expression of Dunn's similar, Platonic view of poetry, which seals off literature from the event of interpretation, it is a more important aspect of the poem that it reflects on a belief in the tenacious survival of the lyrical instinct, which he discusses in his yet unpublished lecture 'Literature and the World'.[16] This instinct may be the site of redemption for the historically situated individual, and so timelessness and history, pure aestheticism and public involvement meet in the subjectivity of one who writes or reads poetry, and trusts in or cares for the truth in it.

The importance of irony in Dunn's poetry is a point often missed by critics. The occasional light irony in Politovsky's story usually originates in the stylistic technique of understatement, for example when the Russian fleet's near-circumnavigation of the globe gets described as taking 'the long way round' (*DE*, 7). But irony thrives principally on melancholy and nostalgia in both *The Donkey's Ears* and *The Year's Afternoon*. In his review of the latter book, Ian Tromp carefully distinguishes between the two moods.[17] Although it is possible to do so, it is probably an unnecessary effort,

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[14] T. S. Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry', in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 107-14 (p. 111).
[15] Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 213.
[16] Douglas Dunn, 'Literature and the World', first delivered at the Edinburgh Book Festival in August 2000 as 'The P.E.N. Lecture', then in Eötvös College (Budapest) in September 2000. Hungarian translation: Douglas Dunn, 'Világ és irodalom' [an extract], trans. by Győző Ferencz, *Népszabadság* (Budapest), 30 September 2000, p. 30.
[17] Ian Tromp, 'His Lyric Care' [a review of *YA*], *Poetry Review*, 90.4 (2000), 64-65 (pp. 64-65).

since in the present case nostalgia and melancholy depend on each other as cause and effect. Marsilio Ficino provides a sharp definition of the state of melancholy. The recent Nobel Prize winner Günter Grass quotes the Italian humanist as saying: 'These days, so to say, I don't know what I want, perhaps I don't even want what I know, and want what I don't know'.[18] Grass also reminds us that it was Aristotle who first legitimised melancholy by identifying it as the starting point of artistic and scientific activities. This may be true for both of Dunn's alter egos, that is Politovsky and the lyrical self of *The Year's Afternoon*, because it is the spiritual uncertainty pointed out by Ficino that gives rise to poetic self-analysis. 'Much of poetry', Dunn suggests in his notes on *The Year's Afternoon*, 'depends on the exposure of the heart. In poetry, there should be no holding back. To trim, to undersay, and to over-say, to trade in the pusillanimous or the boastful, contradicts a principle of poetry'.[19] In various interviews, he has reserved his right as a poet to be melancholic.[20] But melancholy leads to neither confessional poetry nor sentimentality because he all the while preserves a strange but lucid self-awareness, such as when in Politovsky's mask he says, 'poetic types would give/ Their eye-teeth for a subject such as this/ Absence heading into danger' (*DE*, 144). Dunn leaves the more bitter mouthfuls of irony to *The Year's Afternoon*, to poems like '"Contemporary Scottish Writing"', '1996' and 'Art is Wonderful'. A few light jokes elsewhere, for instance when a hedgehog is described as 'a self-propelled handbag' in 'Indolence' (*YA*, 80), do bring some relief, but normally he uses irony to highlight a tragic undercurrent:

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[18] Günter Grass, 'Vom Stillstand im Fortschrift: Variationen zu Albrecht Dürers Kupferstich "Melancholia I"', in *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* (Neuwied und Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1972), 340-68 (p. 347).

[19] Douglas Dunn, 'Exposing the Heart' [on *YA*, the season's Poetry Book Society Choice], in *PBS Bulletin*, 187 (2000), 5-6 (p. 5).

[20] See, for example: Haffenden, 'Douglas Dunn', 29-30; and O'Brien, 'Interview with the Devil', 23.

One day, I might invent

A board or card game, but for one player –
It won't be called 'Solitaire'. I'll call it
'Time On *My* Side', or else 'As *I* Like It'.
I'm lying low, but coming up for air.
(*YA*, 81)

Nostalgia usually originates in the tension between desire and reality. Particularly in Dunn's oppositional structuring of *The Donkey's Ears* everything seems to work towards the highlighting of this juxtaposition. Politovsky's narrative grows out of such antitheses as those between '[c]rowded and lonely, ordered and unfree' life on the sea (*DE*, 47), and between '[t]ropical tortures' and '[p]leasures of winter rime' (*DE*, 94). More directly, the poem's nostalgic mood thrives on the conflict between memory, a 'shadow cast by mind, a rendezvous// With home and trust' (*DE*, 59), and a grotesque and increasingly menacing reality. And although, of course, one may find different examples in a work of such length for moments of lethargy and depression, the tensions of home and away, and love and its absence, which provide the general emotional charge of the poem, tend to surface in a form of quiet melancholy rather than frustration, as is implied in the poem's characteristically tranquil lyricism:

A clockhand searchlight drops its silver on
Small waves that shatter it. From *Suvorov*
I watch these little lights float, thinking of
Your bird-crumbs scattered on a frosted lawn.
(*DE*, 7)

It has to be mentioned at this point that the typical iconography of *The Donkey's Ears*, with its images of 'fragile, frosted birches, and the snow' (*DE*, 51), owes much to the susceptible but often bare and icy dream world of *Elegies*. The ability to evoke in his

imagination what turns into a soothing coolness and purity of this illusory realm, and to put his trust in a reunion with the loved one, carries for Dunn's protagonist the last chance of salvation.

The growing of distance becomes synonymous with an increasing sense of alienation in *The Donkey's Ears*. Politovsky's deceptive dreams of the Russian snow at home while he comes from dry and sunny Tashkent tells about the way time, loss or absence erode self-identity. On his epic journey from the Baltic to the South China Sea Politovsky encounters all the exotic things and circumstances that the southern hemisphere has on offer. Although Dunn takes delight in using foreign place-names such as Samarkand or Tashkent, more often than not the exotic is alien rather than fascinating, like the unfamiliar birds and animals that are all 'nameless' to Politovsky (*DE*, 49). The idea of namelessness reverberates the way Dunn illustrated the concept of foreignness earlier in 'Dieback' in *Northlight*. Sometimes the exotic is even wild and unnatural, such as Fillipovsky's 'pets' (a snake and a crocodile), the details of cannibalism, or the Chinamen's attempt to sell their own children. The poem also produces an exceptionally keen sense of the eccentric and the bizarre by making the familiar unfamiliar. Sea burials are seen with the eyes of a man who is educated in the sciences, and knows that the body will keep floating in the water for a long time. The images of oxen, hens and geese waiting to be slaughtered, as well as monkeys, parrots and other dry land animals on the decks surrounded by the watermass transforms the fleet into a strange Noah's Ark (*DE*, 53), whereas the trail of litter dumped in the sea directs the reader's attention to contemporary environmental issues. The individual's alienation from his or her own past, and the discrepancy between childhood promises and one's adult self, finds a correlative in the mother figure when Politovsky remembers that it was his mother who planted in him a desire for the sea. The

romanticism implied in his memories and boyhood's visions of white sails (*DE*, 130) creates a sharp contrast with the reality of the greasy valves and the toil involved in keeping the fleet going. One must also note the Freudian association between the womb and the ship's hull, which is the typical site of Politovsky's daily work. The images of mother, snow and sea constitute a triptych that brings again the idea of Mother Russia, as well as the way that the individual's circumstances are predetermined and may be betrayed by the homeland, to the centre of attention:

> What did I learn that night, what was I taught
>
> Far from Tashkent, my mother holding me? –
> 'See, Eugen,' – she said me [*sic!*] in German – 'There!
> I think of snow as poetry and prayer.
> One day, my son, I'll take you to the sea.'
> (*DE*, 123)

As noted above, in Dunn literary imagination often involves an ethical overtone. In this respect the novelty of *The Donkey's Ears* lies in the fact that the presence of moralism is now openly acknowledged. In his afterword Dunn admits to have followed the rules of ethics, 'and they do exist', as well as the rules of imagination, which 'don't exist but which any writer responsible to time and people hopes to serve' (*DE*, 176). 'We're turning into fiction', Politovsky remarks on halfway of his naval voyage (*DE*, 84). As for the rules of fiction, the presence of a premeditated literariness can be traced on all levels of *The Donkey's Ears*. Dunn defines it as a long poem as opposed to the verse narrative, which he might hold to be an outdated genre. While having respect for his own classification, it has to be noted that any such distinction in this case is not so unambiguous. Dunn wrote the poem in *abba* rhymed quatrains of sometimes deliberately disrupted decasyllabic lines, and maintains the same metre throughout 172 pages. His stamina is admirable, and his persistence

certainly demonstrates the survival and the legitimacy of traditional verse forms, though it must be admitted that metrical and stanzaic variety, as sampled in *Europa's Lover*, can produce a more stimulating effect. Beyond its verse form, *The Donkey's Ears* exhibits all the customary features of the novel: it has a plot, a narrator, episodic and main characters, and we may even speak about character development, in the case of Fillipovsky.

Politovsky, the first person story teller, presents a linear narrative which is occasionally interrupted with shorter digressions, soliloquies, lyrical inserts, and even direct dialogues. While of course he is a narrator with a limited perspective, one may still discern a sense of helpless omniscience, which is combined with the self-appointed role of the outsider: 'I sit in a corner, my love, my glass/ A perfect image of a small, clear sea' (*DE*, 9). Within the constant and balanced frame of metrical verse, Dunn's treatment of his subject exhibits the binary pull of Neoclassicism and Modernism, just as his diction habitually moves between a somewhat rhetorical and a more natural, conversational style. Politovsky's dreams are always lyrical, and often surreal or fantastic, whereas his extensive parading of Latin gods and goddesses from Venus to Mars and Neptune or his appeals to the 'mermaid Muse' (*DE*, 21; 145) reveals Dunn's neoclassical orientation. His discursive style, which emerges in Politovsky's anecdotes, on Helville (*DE*, 48-49) or French colonial society (*DE*, 82-84), is a special strength, and so are the episodes about Nossi Bé (*DE*, 44), Titov (*DE*, 54-55) or the 'holy fool' (*DE*, 131-33). Probably the most entertaining and psychologically the most complex of these is found in Part Five, when in one of his optimistic moments Politovsky pictures himself as a grumpy retired officer, and concludes on his imagined role as society's living conscience:

> And then I'll go quiet. I'll sink in my chair.
> There are those who'll think it's all for effect
> And quite beneath their hardnosed intellect.
> Later, I'll jump up and shout, *I've been there!*
> (*DE,* 86)

The journey is termed a 'literary cruise' (*DE*, 11), and the idea of literariness is also present both in the figure of the Chekhov fan Captain Ignatzius and in direct references to Pushkin, Homer, Camões and other writers. Although no significant Old English influence suggests itself in Dunn's poetry in general, this poem on occasion conjures up Anglo-Saxon stylistic reminiscences, as in the fleet's description as a 'sea-hoofed [...] beast' (*DE*, 7). His style can be aphoristic, but invariably tends to retain a sharp sense of self-irony: 'Do your best/ By what you have. Destiny does the rest./ [...] Well, that's "wisdom" for you' (*DE*, 125). He draws thematic and stylistic parallels between the Russian fleet's destiny and another famous literary voyage in Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' with the help of the albatross image (*DE*, 23; 25) and in the description of lethargy and deteriorating discipline on the 'ghost ships' (*DE*, 58-59). Even a touch of mythologism seeps in with the heartening incident of the releasing of a dove (*DE*, 135), though, as it turns out, this time the biblical bird fails to bring good luck.

As a retake of *Elegies*, *The Donkey's Ears* tells a story of forced separation from the loved one while irreversible time slowly transforms into distance, into 'months of miles' (*DE*, 126). Politovsky's sense of duty and the compulsions of the historical circumstances represent a new territory compared to the purely lyrical situation behind *Elegies*. Moreover, part of the nostalgia in *The Donkey's Ears* originates in the conflict between a coarsely masculine environment on the ships and the images of a distant domestic world: 'rude men scribble thoughts of flowers/ In the half-dark, and I remember you/ In Samarkand in the Islamic blue under your parasol'

(*DE*, 153). The heavy smoking and drinking that define life in the fleet are contrasted on several occasions with the realm of a feminine domesticity, which represents more than just civilisation and a peaceful living as Dunn turns it into a small-scale redemption, a 'laundered paradise' (*DE*, 59). As long as the book continues the concerns of *Elegies*, Politovsky may be seen as a poetic mask for Dunn. 'At times I felt I had become my narrator', he writes in his notes to the poem (*DE*, 175). However, Gaston Bachelard's concept of 'a non-I which belongs to the I', in which Dunn started to develop an interest in the late-1990s, may offer a more subtle paradigm in which to discuss Politovsky as a potential alter ego. Bachelard writes:

> Poetic reverie is a cosmic reverie. It is an opening to a beautiful world, to beautiful worlds. It gives the I a non-I which belongs to the I: my non-I. It is this "my non-I" which enchants the I of the dreamer and which poets can help us share.[21]

Dunn understands this 'non-I' as a 'fluid, non-egotistical first-person singular, a poetic I'.[22] Arguably, this idea allows more freedom than the both culturally and technically restrictive terms 'persona' and 'mask', and is also valid for the lyrical self of *The Year's Afternoon* in a context that is only slightly different. Unlike the other terms, Bachelard's concept can be usefully extended to lyric poetry, because it describes a frame of mind rather than a poetic technique or procedure. As Dunn explains in the same essay, 'much poetry depends on what I call "the quality of the first-person singular", and which, I suggest, is the *artistic* quality of a poet's personality instead of a reliance on the autobiographical merely'.[23] Both Dunn and his military engineer are

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[21] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language and the Cosmos*, trans. by Daniel Russell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 13.
[22] Douglas Dunn, 'A Difficult, Simple Art', in *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, ed. by W. N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 2000), 163-66 (p. 165).
[23] Ibid.

drawn to what can be best described as responsible individualism, which involves a promotion of domesticity and marriage, and presupposes both solidarity with the socially handicapped and the defence of privacy. It is interesting to notice that both Dunn and Politovsky are torn between progress and tradition and between commitments to profession and marriage. 'Work and profession stole our only time./ I let it happen, though. Obsessed with it', says Politovsky (*DE*, 153), and Dunn refers to his own, almost identical, predicament in 'Pushkin's Ring' and 'Native Meditation' in *The Year's Afternoon*. Certain aspects in the iconography of *The Donkey's Ears*, such as the typical images of birch and snow, evidently continue the aesthetics of *Elegies*. Compared to that earlier collection, Politovsky's love poetry is much less idealising, but he still manages to reach some tenderly lyrical peaks.

Literariness in *The Year's Afternoon* is of a different kind but not less individualistic and self-aware. Its most striking feature is perhaps the extensive portrait gallery of poets that can be reconstructed from the poems. Dunn mentions more than twenty, both Scottish and international poets. He proclaims a bond with all of them in various ways: stylistically with Shakespeare, Browning and Rilke; spiritually with the atheist Shelley, the romantic Pushkin and the lyrical Keats and Leopardi; and politically with Pasternak, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva and Mandelshtam's commitment as well as MacCaig's individualism and Neruda's inclusive humanism. He proposes kinship with Auden, whose metrical poetry he admires, and there is a strong sense of apprenticeship to Philip Larkin. For all their wide ranging internationalism, literary identity in both *The Donkey's Ears* and *The Year's Afternoon* is also Scottish to an obvious extent. Politovsky speaks English with a Scottish accent, as some of the line endings and his vocabulary give away, while the reader is reminded on two occasions that the Russian fleet sails under the flag of St Andrew's Cross. Scottish identity in *The Year's*

*Afternoon* is very local, and, in spite of Dunn's frequent references to Scottish writers, painters and explorers, is not as firmly rooted in collective history as it is in *Northlight* or *Dante's Drum-kit*. *The Year's Afternoon* is, of course, a very personal book, but Dunn does not seem to aspire even for the indirect link between historically situated autobiography and the community's past that lent a sudden effect to *Love or Nothing*. Most of the poems in this case are solidly attached to North-East Fife but the book's binary localism, centred in Tayport and Dairsie, reflects the polarisation of two different periods in his life. Although his academic position has connected him to its ancient university for ten years now, and he is on intimate terms with its historic lore, St Andrews does not seem to find a way into the heart of his lyricism, which is all the more surprising given the immediate locality of the earlier sequence 'Anon's People'. The small coastal town provides the setting for two poems, 'The Black Douglas' and 'March 13, 1994', but in both cases it is presented in a negative light and even without being overtly identified. The background of The Picture House in North Street, The Tav and Ma Brown's (now The North Point Café) reveals the identity of the place only for those readers who are familiar with its surroundings, and so, despite his strong atmospheric writing, these two poems do not contribute significantly to his otherwise straightforward regionalism.

*The Donkey's Ears* records the individual's alienation from corrupt historical time. Politovsky's figure becomes a symbol of this alienation, serving in a fleet that 'affront[s] the universe':

> Is it humanity or is it us
> Alone, refuses to face facts of war
> In favour of a mediaeval 'honour'?
> On both counts, Yes.
> (*DE*, 45)

Politovsky is an outsider not only in a technical sense as a narrator but his spiritual anxiety is also objectified in his naval voyage. When Dunn makes him say 'truth *is* lonely. Truth is solitude', he probably refers to this psychological alienation, to the loneliness of seeing and feeling, though, by ambiguously describing solitude as 'painful, bitter, beautiful, and good' (*DE*, 149), Politovsky seems to contradict the spirit of solidarity he always stands up for. The Flag-Engineer may be seen as an inner émigré in the Russian fleet, and so he is a personification of Dunn's concerns with the poet's place in society. A near-synonym of the term, 'exile' crops up in an adjectival function, and is associated with a spiritual state, in 'Woodnotes': 'Exilic, but the root still strong and deep' (*YA*, 39). As pointed out, Dunn is aware that the term 'inner exile' comes from Russia, and I have suggested that it needs to be distinguished from the other term 'inner émigré', which has permitted various interpretations in literary history, and in its spiritual considerations is particularly relevant to his view of the ambivalent social predicaments of poetry. The Russian context of *The Donkey's Ears* potentially allows him to create a rich metaphorical subtext of Politovsky's situation in the fleet, especially in the way the engineer is allowed to 'jump like a flea' from one ship to an other (*DE*, 157), but it is not fully exploited. Politovsky's freedom in this way may be an allegory of Dunn's own spiritual internationalism that has also involved his relocations to France, England and the United States. That Politovsky often finds an excuse to sail to *Borodino*, the 'happy ship' (*DE*, 140) whose crew consists of volunteers, seems to vindicate the poet's right of 'inner emigration' (in the metaphorical sense), but also registers on various levels the binary tensions of political actuality and unconcerned individualism, and of external demands and wilful commitment. At times Politovsky poses as a revolutionary – 'Lips sealed, etcetera' (*DE*, 58) – and throughout about the first half of the story he is suspicious of his

servant Golovko for spying on him, though his political threat never comes across forcefully. That Dunn makes Politovsky a poet as well as an officer who can repair the machines that keep the fleet going, in the end it seems to confirm his belief in the curative function of poetry in a social context.

As earlier, Dunn's view of alienation can be best understood through an analysis of his perception of time. Just as in *Dante's Drum-kit*, by setting up an opposition between nature and history ('In Nature, Sophie, there's no *either/or*// But history is all alternatives', *DE*, 73) he uncouples the secular chronology of history from organic time in *The Donkey's Ears*. Approaching the end of his journey, Politovsky categorically renounces historical time for it is irreversible and does not bear the promise of redemption for the individual:

> I've arrived at history. I always knew,
> From day one, all along, I was in it.
> Time is incurable and not a minute
> Goes back to where and when it was the true
>
> Happiness of our lives.
> (*DE*, 129-30)

While both his choice of profession as a military engineer and his belief in 'progress' are appendices to a historical view of time, the lyricism of his dreams and his meditations portray Politovsky as one who is also sensitive to other, spiritual forms of temporality. When the Flag-Engineer says in the early phase of the journey that 'summer overlapped autumn' (*DE*, 1), it may imply that Dunn equips him with a capability to comprehend the passing of time in a way that is more natural, as well as more complex, than the simple tracking of its 'artificial corners'. *The Donkey's Ears* inherits an iconography that includes moonlight, water and a view of the coastal lights from *Northlight*. In that collection these images define a single lyrical moment which is

representative of an omnipresent and already consummated metaphysical time. For all its political subtext embedded in national history and present-day actuality, as pointed out, *Dante's Drum-kit* acts out a retreat from Dunn's earlier aspiration towards creating a synthesis between Messianic and calendrical times. His disillusionment with this synthesis is particularly obvious in 'Body Echoes', and the in-betweenness of the lyrical moment only comes to define a private chronology in poems like 'Disenchantments', 'Early Autumn' and 'Just Standing There'. The changing evaluation of time paves the way for the relevance of solitude in Dunn's most recent poetry, and finds a form in the lyrical justification of privacy in *The Year's Afternoon*, and in the justification of fantasy and composure as two possible strategies to rise above historical predestination in *The Donkey's Ears*. Messianic time as a potential site of redemption does not even emerge in Politovsky's story. Time is devoid of any previous quasi-religious resonance and its value and authenticity are assumed to originate in its mere being:

> But time is pure –
> For what it does or doesn't do, no cure,
> Only what happens, and only what is.
> (*DE*, 130)

*The Donkey's Ears* records the story of a man trapped in dangerous historical circumstances, and it is exactly this predicament that the lyrical self in *The Year's Afternoon*, with his essentially civilian value system, wishes to turn his back on. While 'A European Dream' brings the miseries of history down to the contemporary reader, 'Pre-' wanders back to an age in the life of the Earth before any form of temporal awareness existed, when stones were waiting 'ignorant of time/ Before the cults of measurement and value' (*YA*, 9). It was an unpeopled time of 'pre-onomastic

clocklessness' that preceded the birth of subjectivity and historical consciousness, the 'invention of flesh and ethics' (*YA*, 9). 'Pre-' is a rare example of Dunn's geological poetry and it echoes the introductory poems of Edwin Morgan's *Sonnets from Scotland* rather than MacDiarmid's poems of a similar subject matter. Dunn steers clear of MacDiarmid's scientific vocabulary, and he is interested in describing the genesis of the Earth through heat and fire instead of probing a jagged and rough, cold landscape. But if Morgan launches his sonnet sequence with a transparent statement, 'There is no beginning', in the poem 'Slate', and repeats the idea in his citation of the eighteenth century Scottish geologist, James Hutton's thesis in 'Theory of the Earth',[24] Dunn aims to go back to the preface in the story of the Earth. 'Pre-', with its potentially transcendentalist, extra-historical viewpoint, again implies a teleologically motivated and essentialist view of interpretation (in hermeneutic terms) as opposed to its openness in every direction, though the random voyage of Pushkin's ring in the poem of the same title implies the spontaneity of interpretation. As suggested earlier, Dunn is not a kindred spirit with Morgan, and his cosmology in 'Pre-', which is embedded in a fatalist and mythological view of history, recalls Edwin Muir's disenchanted, negative teleology.

'Sunrise' contemplates the moment of beginning on a smaller scale. Here Dunn reaffirms his commitment to reach *Northlight*'s lyrical moment which, in spite of its roots in this case in an ordinary morning, is again representative of the 'not here' and the 'not now'. Even the poem's identifiable setting at the Firth of Tay is the same, only the route taken is the reverse of what one could observe in the earlier collection: rather than proceeding from the commonplace towards the spiritual, the poem performs a

[24] Edwin Morgan, 'Slate' and 'Theory of the Earth', in *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), 437; 443.

movement 'from strangeness into domesticity' as light comes into the world and 'Night shrinks into corners under trees' (*YA*, 21). Strangeness does not disappear with the night because, through Jaccottet's case, it is also inherent in the everyday. But the threat of the spiritual is detectable in the description of the shades that 'will crawl like fugitives all day', just as the speaker's privacy is 'invaded' by the universe (*YA*, 21). Dunn gives voice to his disenchantment with history in 'Art is Wonderful', which directly follows this poem. However, where the true extent of his disillusionment can be gauged is not even in the way he reacts to the past, but rather when he realises in a poem like 'Night Watch' that the lyrical moment itself, this spiritual crossroads of past, present and future in the here and now, has become devoid of a possible redemption:

> Familiar rooftops, treetops, closing in
> On the window, no longer protect me.
> Birch, box, wall, and the skyline reject me,
> And the parish breaks as sweat on my skin
> As I watch the pulsing of my Gatsby-light
> On the Angus shore. How many tons of Tay
> Pass silently as I say this, careless,
> Waiting?
> (*YA*, 60)

The typical iconography of *Northlight* lingers on here, but the objects of the landscape and the light effects on the Firth have by now changed into mere 'accessories of solitude' (*YA*, 60). 'Night Watch' leads us back to before the moment of beginning, but the genesis of the light is 'exhausted', and renunciation, trepidation and even fear pervade the poem as Dunn projects these feelings onto a landscape that is heavily polarised between the near and the distant, and between the small and the large, and is seen from behind the hermetic window-pane.

Dunn continues the theme of alienation from history in 'Early Hours in Dairsie', which suggests that the '2 follows 1, etcetera' truth of calendrical time has

become its own self-parody, 'a mere mumble of time' (*YA*, 77). In contrast with the supposed accuracy of artificially measured chronology, he tries to conform to the rhythm of subjective temporality, which is symbolised by the heart, 'the soft clock/ Within me', in 'Woodnotes' (*YA*, 38). The detachment of private time from any form of collective chronology leads to what I termed 'pastoral decadence' above. While this is also an important feature in *Dante's Drum-kit*, its most obvious pattern may be found in 'Indolence', the poem that concludes *The Year's Afternoon*. As its title, and the various synonyms of the expression 'time to do/ Nothing' (*YA*, 80) may suggest, private time is the site of meditation and relaxation even to the measure of inertia. The preferred scene of this fleeting inactivity is the garden, which turns into an environment that shelters the lyrical subject from the community, and from duty, work and other unwanted intruders. It is important that the garden settings in 'The Year's Afternoon' and 'Indolence' frame the collection. In this small-scale, first person singular pastoral the private republicanism of *Dante's Drum-kit* is fulfilled, and the way that Dunn reaffirms the personal ownership of his property also creates a complex, and not always unambiguous, resonance with the preoccupations of *Barbarians*: 'All this is *my* property! [...] mine own/ Estate and little home, and all for me' (*YA*, 80). However, what eventually prevents him from self-contradiction is that the garden loses its earlier metaphorical function as the emblem of a cultural take-over, and even becomes an almost acultural domain, as may be inferred from the above cited incident of the poet-persona's kicking and drenching of a book. Rather, it is the natural attributes of the garden that are elevated in the poem: flowers, birds, bees and other creatures which make their occasional visits. The term 'pastoral decadence' certainly can be an overstatement inasmuch as what Dunn's writing entails here is simply a modest, solitary epicureanism and a cult of natural beauty: 'Thank God/ For chairs, cushions,

blue sky, and peace and quiet.// [...] Thank God, too, for this Chablis, black olives,/ Sunshine, and all these fragile butterflies' (*YA*, 80). But what justifies the continued use of this term is that in these poems the pastoral loses its earlier role as an occasion of hidden or overt social criticism, which could be noted for example in *Barbarians* and *Northlight*. The garden becomes a scene of seclusion that parallels Andrew Marvell's perceptions of the pastoral, especially in 'The Garden':

> Fair quiet, have I found thee here,
> And Innocence thy Sister dear!
> Mistaken long, I sought you then
> In busie Companies of Men.
> Your sacred Plants, if here below,
> Only among the Plants will grow.
> Society is all but rude,
> To this delicious Solitude.[25]

In 'The Year's Afternoon' Dunn magnifies a brief but all the more satisfying interlude of inactivity to a degree that recalls MacCaig's 'Zen Calvinism' as the observation of vegetative life reacts on the lyrical subject's perception of his primary existence: 'I sink like a slow root [...]/ For a little while I shall be nothing and good' (*YA*, 4). While the contrast between Dunn's momentary indifference to society and his characteristic humanism activates an opulent tension among the poems, he defends and celebrates private time in 'The Year's Afternoon': 'I am free to do whatever I wish/ In these hours, and I have chosen this/ Liberty' (*YA*, 4). 'This is my time', the poem repeats suggestively, and it is the time of meditation, 'of getting rid of myself' and, most importantly, it is a time 'without history' (*YA*, 3; 4). A similar feeling of transitory indifference is evident in *The Donkey's Ears* when Politovsky ironically comments on

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[25] Andrew Marvell, 'The Garden', in *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, ed. by H. M. Margoliouth, 3rd edn, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), I: *Poems*, 51-53 (p. 51).

his refusal to get out of bed on Easter Day: 'Christ rose today, but I didn't' (*DE*, 155). This incident foreshadows the approaching catastrophe of the Russian fleet and the death of the protagonist through implying the untransferability of religious salvation into the ordinary world, and is also eloquent on Dunn's often reluctantly undertaken public responsibility.

Dunn links up the political commitment of literature with the privacy of solitude in some poems in *The Year's Afternoon* but a sense of incompetence to fulfil the role of the public poet eclipses these attempts. The silence of reflection fills the poem 'Native Meditation', in which the 'bitter, native sip' of whisky resounds his expression of his unwilling commitment to Scotland from 'Renfrewshire Traveller' in *Love or Nothing*:

> A lonely, lyric husbandry of thought
> And poetry, the curse of scholarship,
> Work's albatross, this bitter, native sip
> That is a liquid and ancestral cry...
> (*YA*, 59)

The energy and light of the flames in the fireplace are juxtaposed with the stillness and darkness of the nightly room and with the contemplative, passive mood of the speaker. Through an implied *via negativa* technique, the emphatically domestic setting (a warm sitting-room by the fire) and vocabulary ('husbandry', 'domestic' and 'native', the last of which may refer both to a smaller and a larger community) work together to magnify the dejection of loneliness. Like the subsequent 'Night Watch', the poem is a variation on the Petrarchan sonnet with an alternating rhyme scheme, which graphically reproduces the cycle of the flames that rise and die and rise again. From a retrospective viewpoint Dunn inverts the ambition of cultural take-over, the main concern of *Barbarians*, into the Ancient Mariner's curse, and blames it for his own present-day

solitude as the 'timber turns to ash' (*YA*, 59). His disenchantment is further highlighted by a conceivable transfer of the adjectives 'native' and 'bitter' to the scholarship theme. They are the attributes of whisky, but, due to their proximity in the next line and to the ambivalence of the syntax, they may function so as to supplement the perception of public commitment as tribulation, also potentially alluding to an assumed hostile cultural environment in Scotland. However, the last line, which hides the word 'heart', saves the poem from nihilism, and reaffirms his personal belief in poetry: 'This hearth-flame rises and it will never die' (*YA*, 59).

The same idea of ineptness, painted in an even darker colour, pervades Dunn's 'Robert Fergusson',[26] which is one of the poems that were commissioned from ten contemporary poets (including Kathleen Jamie, Edwin Morgan and John Burnside) by the School of English at St Andrews to honour the 250th anniversary of the poet, who graduated from the university. The poem is an elegy on one of the less well-known figures of Scottish literary history waiting for reassessment, and in this respect is the continuation of 'Tannahill' and 'John Wilson in Greenock, 1786' from *St Kilda's Parliament*. Similarly to the other two eighteenth-century poets, Fergusson's life gives another example of aborted talent. Dunn's poem combines the components and technical attributes of various genres: it is both a churchyard elegy and a pastoral poem, while the elements of the private elegy and *ars poetica* also filter in the framework of the meditative poem. He did not include it in *The Year's Afternoon*, although its style with a vocabulary that prominently features elements like 'dead', 'ghost' and 'lonely' do establish a common identity between 'Robert Fergusson' and the poems of that collection. The state of melancholy, which originates in the feeling of insufficiency,

[26] Douglas Dunn, 'Robert Fergusson', online: http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~www_se/fergusson/homecorrect.html (2000).

missed opportunities and in a search for 'that lost thing', relates the speaker to the lyrical self of *The Year's Afternoon* even to the degree of verbatim correspondences. Dunn's sigh in the last line of the first stanza, '"If only..."', becomes the title of a poem, whereas other expressions such as 'keeping time' and 'breaking the heart' commonly occur in the lyrical book as well as in *The Donkey's Ears*. The setting is a tangible winter landscape but its whereabouts remain ambiguous, as the location shifts between a churchyard, a garden and the typical scene of Dunn's solitary walks. Fergusson's elusive and Protean quality evokes the theme of the uncertainty of interpretation from 'Pushkin's Ring' and 'A Theory of Literary Criticism':

> I'm getting closer to you, working
> My way to where you're lurking.
> Under this pile? Here? There?
> I scuff and sift them both. There? Where?[27]

The way the meditation is continued leaves the reader in doubt whether it is the eighteenth-century poet who is the real addressee, or rather Dunn's first wife: 'Lovely woman, give me your kiss'. The flight of the geese above the Tay, a view that compounds art and 'madness' in a single image, alludes to the tragic life of the eighteenth-century poet who went mad at the age of twenty-four, but also links up with the same, memorable iconography of 'Leaving Dundee' in *Elegies*.

Born in Edinburgh, Fergusson studied in Dundee and St Andrews, which justifies the North-East Fife locality of this elegy, but Dunn goes even further when in the second half he zooms in on the pastoral environment of his garden with a summerhouse. The usual properties of pastoral verse, however, are still absent: the

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[27] Ibid.

garden is a solitary place which is dominated by the menacing presence of an owl, a crow, and a black dog that 'stalks my dreams, and barks/ Before breakfast'. Dunn reaches a synthesis of conversational and poetic styles in the poem. The movement in 'Robert Fergusson' may appear to be unplanned and rambling at first glance. But on careful examination the poem reveals a premeditated symmetry and a not too strict, reasonable formalism that leaves enough space for Dunn in which to reflect on the changes of his mood. The poem consists of eleven stanzas of ten alternating tetrameters and trimeters but the length of the last two lines is variable. Dunn maintains couplet rhymes, which are sometimes probably a hint too daring, as in the lines 'It's a condition of verse/ That it should make life worse'. On other occasions he lavishly piles up internal and end rhymes, which (combined with run-on syntax, repetition, accumulation and variation) lend a degree of liquidity and musicality that in certain lines would even stand a competition with Verlaine's 'Chanson d'automne':

> High spirits, then the low, so low
> You don't know where to go,
> Or look, or say, or what to do
> While the elusive clue
> Stays secret in the rotting leaves
> The little land-star, the light that grieves...[28]

The rhymes gradually loosen up in the sixth stanza, which is in the centre of the poem, and Dunn temporarily discards them in the stanza that follows, but promptly reflects on it in an irregularly located pair of rhymes that connect the fourth line with the fifth: 'Do you hear? I've ceased to rhyme./ What good did it do to you, keeping time...'. These two lines, highlighted by their solitary rhyme in an unrhymed stanza, create a strange

[28] Ibid.

and contradictory resonance with Politovsky's belief in the redemptive power inherent in the rhythm of poetry. Other forms of symmetry and variation also contribute to the poem's harmonic composition. The lyrical couplet 'Something about a coat is lonely/ "As if...", "If only..."' and its variation 'Something about a shoe is lonely...' occur in the first, and then in the fourth and eighth stanzas. Following the symmetry of this design, the same couplet should reappear in the last stanza, but Dunn frustrates our expectation by a sudden shift from this abstract image of melancholy to a more tangible, first-hand experience in the poem's conclusion:

> For I'm one of the awkward squad
> Who lives with the songthrush
> In his dacha, in the hush
> Between the road and evening
> In the tree-swish when birds sing.[29]

Continuing the theme of loneliness, 'Dinner' describes a meal with a lucky friend who is 'ignorant of the gluttonies of aloneness' (*YA*, 61). While on the surface it seems to pertain to the emptiness of unmarried life, through its unobtrusive allusion to Christ's Last Supper the poem also assumes a religious and, indirectly, public context:

> Slowly, with gratitude, I emptied the plate,
> Wiped it with bread, drank down my wine and water.
> (*YA*, 61)

The expression 'life without a kiss', then, may equally refer to not merely a lonely domesticity, but may also imply that Dunn's life is even devoid of a Judas kiss that could trigger the accomplishment of his public responsibility. 'The Black Douglas',

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[29] Ibid.

whose title alludes to Sir James Douglas (who was a friend of King Robert the Bruce) as well as to Dunn himself, is about a similar sense of incompetence to fulfil the poet's public role. Sir James helped to achieve a peace treaty between Scotland and England, and, according to the legend, after Robert's death he took the king's heart with him on a crusade to the Holy Land. Dunn engages in a quixotic fantasy fight in which helpless self-sacrifice links up with loyalty to his people: 'This time/ I'll throw the casketed hearts of my dead friends/ And then I'll throw my own' (*YA*, 37). The contrasts between an ordinary café and spiderspotting in a Celtic cave (which in its randomness accommodates the ironic moment of Dunn's 'Celtica' from *The Happier Life*), between leisure and work, and between reality and imagination are expressed in a conversational diction in loosely iambic but unrhymed lines. The poem represents an incompetent and futile heroism in the face of historical time which is pathetic in its ordinariness, and involves what may be interpreted either as a *Braveheart* parody or as a criticism of politically engaged poetry:

> They won't be impressed. Therefore, I'll ride on
> Into the glade of swords, yelling 'Scotland!
> I'm doing my best and my worst! Hallelujah!'
> (*YA*, 37)

The moments of doubt and indecision also emerge in 'On Whether Loneliness Ever Has a Beginning', as this time Dunn lacks the principled moral stance that characterises his early work: 'Still keeping true/ To some belief or other// I don't know much about/ and have no name for' (*YA*, 56).

In *The Year's Afternoon* stock-taking affects a variety of topics, such as remembering friends, teachers, other poets and places in poems such as 'T. E. Lawrence at the Ozone' (in memoriam George Kendrick), 'Three Poets', 'Teachers',

which is in part dedicated to the memory of Philip Larkin, or 'Venezuela', which was inspired by a visit to the South American country. Added to a fleeting impression of idleness ('I could do lots of things./ But probably, I'll do nothing at all', *YA*, 65), the poem attests the private nature of poetry and its lyrical autonomy:

> There's something in me that insists it sings
> Freely, for nothing, the lovely, lonely art
> Called poetry, an art you understand.
> (*YA*, 65)

While 'East Riding' is about the importance of not returning to certain places ('Just let it always be the way/ It was', *YA*, 67), in the subsequent poem, the scrupulously titled '*Bête Noire*'s Edition of *Terry Street* with Photographs by Robert Whitaker', Dunn records an imaginary revisiting of the Hull district whose memory seems to be haunting him throughout his career. Probably the strongest moment of the poem may be found in the conciseness of a single line that tells the story of a life: 'Love, life, death, love, and children' (*YA*, 69). His doubt about the exactness and truth value of documentary photography has a long record from *Terry Street* on, and it may be the sign of retrospective sentimentalism that now Whitaker's pictures are simply described as 'truthful' (*YA*, 69). As one of the few relatively cheerful pieces in the book, it contains Dunn's verdict on life that is affirmative and reassuring:

> This is my mythology,
> My witness that life is the best thing that can happen to us,
> That it is warm with laughter, love, complaints, and tragedies.
> (*YA*, 70)

However, in both *The Donkey's Ears* and *The Year's Afternoon* the anatomy of solitude remains Dunn's main theme. Politovsky's loneliness in a claustrophobic ship

is extended into a universal metaphor of existential alienation when the fleet is described as the sum of 'multiple solitudes' (*DE*, 111). If, as Politovsky says, solitude 'brings an understanding of the finer things' (*DE*, 153), then in *The Year's Afternoon* it mainly gives rise to lethargy, and to a disconsolate obsession with the past. Although the conventional paradigm of the stock-taking lyric would normally underwrite a tone of quiet resilience, this book is haunted by a sense of inadequacy that originates first of all in the lyrical subject's assumed inability of understanding. It comes to the fore most candidly in the last lines of 'If Only', which involves a remembering of Dunn's first wife, and thus extends the thematic concerns of *Elegies* to *The Year's Afternoon*:

> I think I'm still there, haunting a gutter.
> If only I knew then what I still don't know.
> (*YA*, 47)

Pastoral seclusion seemed to be a choice of domesticity in *Dante's Drum-kit*, but now the garden is void of children, women and imagined nymphs. Moreover, an uninhabited life is reflected in the lyrical self's nocturnal existence as some of the poems are set at the most unsociable hours of the night. Here silence is not simply the tranquillity of meditation and relaxation, but principally denotes an empty and profound loneliness. 'After my daughter visits/ There is colossal silence', Dunn writes in 'On Whether Loneliness Ever Has a Beginning' (*YA*, 54), which inquires into the nature of the different silences that fill up the poet's days. If 'silent' was the keyword in *The Happier Life*, in this poem none of these silences relate to the community, except perhaps covertly and in a residual form, when Dunn in part locates the stillness of solitude outside the garden's private world:

Now, though, I possess
Particular silence.
I look out on
Nocturnal hillsides

From where my garden ends
And solitude blows back
In my face like something
Sensed but not seen.
(*YA*, 55)

'I am getting to know/ Solitude inside out,/ From all angles', he says in the same poem (*YA*, 53), and it is certain that no reader will put down the book in disbelief. Like 'If Only', 'On Whether Loneliness...' seems to imply the impossibility of achieving a coherent interpretation of one's own life. In Politovsky's story the paradox of the narrator's finite existence and the infinite plot of history that waits to be told by someone is represented in the illusion of having to swallow the sea, and here the inner pressure of clarification materialises in a similar metaphoric compulsion to ingest life:

I compose still lifes –
Oranges, bananas

Apples, grapes, pears,
Books, pens, more books,
Paper, a bottle,
And then I eat them.
(*YA*, 53)

In *The Year's Afternoon* the proximity of death eclipses private time but without destroying its potential to become part of a coherent narrative. The title is an allusion to John Donne's phrase 'the year's midnight' from 'A Nocturnall upon St Lucies Day':

Study me then, you who shall lovers bee
At the next world, that is, at the next Spring:
For I am every dead thing,
In whom love wrought new Alchimie.
For his art did expresse
A quintessence even from nothingnesse,
From dull privations, and leane emptinesse:
He ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot
Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not.[30]

As Dunn writes, that he called his book *The Year's Afternoon* does not imply he is 'more optimistic or less pessimistic' than Donne, and his own title suggests 'middle life as well as a turning point'.[31] Although the pastoral scenery bears a heavy presence in the book, he carefully avoids exploiting harvesting as a symbol of the days of maturity. 'Woodnotes' recalls an out-of-body experience, which came as an after-effect of an anaesthetic surgery that he had previously undergone. The lyrical self's own ghost, his spiritual doppelganger is seen waving from 'ground-misted ferns, and then it's gone' (*YA*, 38). More than *Northlight*'s 'eavesdropping' on another existence, he seems to make a close encounter with the supernatural in the manner of *Elegies*. At the same time, echoing Chekhov's opinion on the same topic, he notes that in his poem he wanted to avoid a 'preposterous, boastful "spirituality"'.[32] A pantheist metaphysics that is free from a sense of Providence pervades here Dunn's perception of private temporality. But, in spite of the poem's spiritual load, he achieves a rather specific poetry of thought that can even earn a Rilkean advice concerning the ethical nature of art, though this time adapted to the predicament of private time: 'Revise your life, and use your solitude' (*YA*, 39). Here he echoes Rilke's maxim: 'Du mußt dein Leben

[30] John Donne, 'A Nocturnall upon St Lucies Day, being the shortest day', in *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets*, ed. by Helen Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 84-85 (pp. 84-85).
[31] Dunn, 'Exposing the Heart', 5.
[32] Ibid.

ändern'.[33] Approaching another realm of existence feels like fading into fiction for the individual. Dunn displays a special gift in suddenly turning the familiar details of his botanical sensibility into alienating effects, and so he unexpectedly 'shoves' the reader into a closeness with spirituality. While the otherworldly loses the comforting quality with which it was associated in *Elegies*, and becomes a bleak and threatening experience, it also prompts the understanding of a greater design of existence. Although he does not exclude it, Dunn certainly surpasses the teleology of calendrical time when he combines private temporality with the infinity of Messianic time in 'Woodnotes'. The intense brevity of the lyrical moment known from *Northlight* now extends in time as if it turned into a slow-motion film that introduces its viewer to the eternal recurrence of life. Dunn's imagery seems to be inspired by French Symbolism and his philosophical style shows reminiscences of Rilke but without imitating the German-language poet, and neither is he religious in the orthodox sense of the word:

> Cool darkness shivered in that leafless tree.
> A drip formed on a fern. I watched it drop.
>
> A tiny noise. Water descending from
> One leaf to another in the laddered air
> And if you listen hard there is rhythm
> To this belated rain on the green stair
> Down to the damp ground, and it is as if
> Water is careful, and leaves are careful too,
> Helping each other on the leaf-cupped cliff
> That is existence, down from the high blue
> Through the green, and into the supporting earth.
> To work this out would show me as a fraud –
> All life's design as birth, and then rebirth.
> (*YA*, 39-40)

[33] "You must change your life." In: Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Archaïscher Torso Apollos', in *Werke*, ed. by Manfred Engel et al., 4 vols. (Frankfurt am Main und Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1996), I: *Gedichte 1895-1910*, ed. by Manfred Engel and Ulrich Fülleborn (1996), 513.

'Three Poets' is an elegy for Norman MacCaig, Sorley MacLean and George Mackay Brown, all of whom died in 1996. The poem confronts the lyrical subject with the idea of approaching death in a different route, by way of the tentative notion of 'everybody mov[ing] up one' in the ranks of the living poets (*YA*, 32). The poem bears the hallmark of a nostalgic and slightly Ossianic mood: 'Come, we should listen to the shadows, to the light,/ To peat becoming ash in the lyrical night' (*YA*, 35). The three poets, 'Our chiefs of men' (*YA*, 36), are celebrated as the lasts of the Mohicans: MacCaig's 'lyric intelligence, but ringed with fire' (*YA*, 33), MacLean's 'warrior Gaelic verse' (*YA*, 34), and Mackay Brown's 'runic psalm' (*YA*, 35) all recall a larger-than-life epic world, which now belongs to the past. Although Dunn's lyric gift in the nostalgic mood has to be acknowledged, it is questionable to what extent such a poetic strategy can achieve contemporaneity and topicality on the threshold of the twenty-first century, or if it was really for our benefit should time reverse to 'a world before the telephone,// Modernity, TV, and apparatus' (*YA*, 35). His contribution with *Elegies* to the elegiac genre is yet to be equalled in contemporary poetry in English. However, for all its heartfelt strength and directness, 'Three Poets' is probably one of the less impressive performances written in this genre in *The Year's Afternoon*, particularly because it trades on some of the less constructive elements of the Burnsian heritage. In a sentimental Scottish fashion Dunn toasts dead poets, who are all male. By confronting the idea of poetry as a masculine domain with the invocation of a female Muse of Caledonia, 'the Muse of our country' (*YA*, 36), here it seems to me that he works against the subtle understanding of femininity he has long pursued, whereas the poem's conclusion falls back on the over-used and slightly sloganeering rhetoric of 'Re-teach us dignity and pride' (*YA*, 36).

Dunn presents a more convincing example of elegy in 'March 13, 1994', which is another appendix to *Elegies*. He revisits the theme of communication with his dead wife across time and space and through a kind of *via negativa* representation: 'Having heard nothing from you for some time/ Makes all the difference' (*YA*, 57). While the past remains another country where one cannot go back, belief in true and undying love may still carry the potential to gain a victory over the irreversibility of temporal and spatial distance. All this is communicated in a meditative and quiet manner, but we may also find bleak colours, particularly in images of the 'sunless side' of North Street in St Andrews and the 'odious darkness' of a black coffee (*YA*, 57). These inverted details of everyday reality summon up the ghastly realm of the 'shabby cloaked' boatman and the dark river from 'Disenchantments' in *Dante's Drum-kit*, whereas the image of a cup of coffee, here described as a 'liquid without light, a sour drink' (*YA*, 57), recalls the theme of Christ's loneliness in 'Dinner' (*YA*, 61). The teeth-marked apple-core in the gutter plays up the resonance of decomposition, and links up with the 'cadaver orchard' image in 'Home Again'. Although expressed in a quietly hesitant and sceptical manner, a comforting belief in meeting his dead wife in another life shows the chance of consolation:

> You don't even remember me. How can you?
> There are distances farther than miles and silence.
> I'll go there. Each day I'm inching closer.
> What's on the menu? Is it too expensive?
> (*YA*, 57)

The finest botanical poet around, Dunn writes exquisitely about steel ships, too, in the mask of the Flag-Engineer, who is in love with 'machines and common spanners' (*DE*, 34), but also dreams of 'Infinite birches in the frost and snow' on landlocked steppes (*DE*, 50). However, Dunn's lyricism is at its best when it involves a

nearly religious communion with familiar nature, as in 'Sunrise' and 'Woodnotes', or in 'Early Hours in Dairsie', which is one of the most elegant poems in *The Year's Afternoon*. His nature poetry is ethereal and gentle, as he establishes it as an alternative channel for his love poetry. Physical reality transforms into feelings and impressions, and in the absence of a woman, nature, with its 'cultivated peace' (*YA*, 78), becomes a surrogate object of his share of love poetry, in which identification with a place and a tender, inclusive lyricism almost inseparably coalesce. 'Early Hours in Dairsie', which is in many respects a companion piece of the short love poem 'You', gives voice to Dunn's spiritual regionalism in a form that is a novel fusion of the love lyric and the pastoral. The poem recalls, and this time finally breaks away from, the idea of political detachment that in Scottish poetry is often associated with MacCaig's 'Patriot': 'I wouldn't call a country mine./ But you *are* my country' (*YA*, 78).

So far, Dunn has demonstrated his capacity to remain open to change and the further development of his poetry is still to be seen. But there is one element that invariably persists in his work from *Terry Street* to *The Year's Afternoon*, and will probably never cease to be his central inspiration. It is his eloquent fidelity to the local landscape that is expressed in an egalitarian and cosmopolitan spirit, and is pervaded by the benevolence of the lyrical poet:

> And should you find it smacks of loneliness,
> I claim it's otherwise, and call it love,
> My local and my universal kiss.
> (*YA*, 78)

* * *

# Conclusion

The main intention of this thesis has been to formulate a consistent account of the evolution of Douglas Dunn's regional, national and supranational allegiances in terms of the reciprocity of lyricism and landscape, and based on my own horizon of expectations as a Central-Eastern European reader, from *Terry Street* to *The Year's Afternoon*. I also aimed to challenge conventional beliefs about the supposedly contradictory nature of political and lyrical poetry by explaining the ways in which Dunn's perceptions of landscape, history and nationality converge in his nature lyric. My chief assumption was that, inasmuch as it reflects the autonomy of an imagination that is firmly rooted in the history and culture of a people but can also cross political boundaries, Dunn's poetry has a model value for the further development of a Scottish literature which could draw further on both native and international influences. On a practical level, my procedure as well as my subject matter itself show that the creative interaction between these parallel affinities has a great potential for supplementing and fertilising the ways in which we imagine the location of our own cultures. Consequently, I addressed myself to the problems of regionalism, 'provincialism', inner emigration and versions of the pastoral as likely sources or means of a Horatian self-emancipation in Dunn's poetry, and generally found that while Dunn's work often points towards the implication of art's freedom to leave topical concerns behind, his lyricism combines the historical and aesthetic dimensions of poetry by aiming to preserve timeless moral standards and principles.

Robert Crawford's concept of the 'identifying poet', which reflects on the ways that certain twentieth-century poets constructed an identity both for themselves and their native or chosen lands, provided a valuable point of departure for

discussing the initial stages in the evolution of Dunn's national and class affiliation. While in this early phase there is no convincing representation of the self in semantic terms, and the frequently occurring verbs of looking, especially in *Terry Street*, express a strong and often embarrassed sense of difference between self and other, it would seem that autobiography offers a means of achieving a degree of identification with the community by indirectly relating the lyrical first person singular to public history. And although Dunn's poems may on occasion betray a sense of opposition, and contemplate the idea of lyrical introversion or a 'surrender' to the language, they also leave room for apparently conflicting sentiments towards Scotland (both affection and indifference), which in turn prepares the ground for a detached but still participatory horizon of interpretation.

Partly with the intention of problematising the often voiced relevance of Bakhtinian theory to the reading of Scottish literature, I considered the practicability of Jaussian hermeneutics to an investigation of Dunn's attitudes to literary tradition and poetic formalism, and to his attempt to establish a dialogue between opposing ideologies or social forces. The widely accepted parallels between perceptions of the inner differentiation or stratification of language in the work of Dunn, Seamus Heaney and Tony Harrison seemed to confirm that in the later 1970s otherness comes to be represented as a text, discourse or form of speech in Dunn's poetry. There is a comparable sense of struggle between various registers in the poetry of Bertolt Brecht and Zbigniew Herbert; and the poetic and ideological uses of the commonplace, as they can be observed in Dunn, allow themselves to be aligned with the idea of spiritual spokesmanship in the poems of Derek Mahon. In general, Dunn's democratic sentiment, revealed mainly in his claiming of kinship with various forms of deprivation, is inspired by the common idea of a republican,

Christian-humanist European sensibility, and is a definitive force in shaping his view of Scottish society throughout his career.

Assuming that Dunn approaches historical and social dilemmas through lyrical identification with the land and what it represents, I considered Cairns Craig's and Homi K. Bhabha's theories of 'in-betweenness' in relation to definitions of the term 'nation' by Benedict Anderson and Ernest Renan. By exploring the space between secular and metaphorical apprehensions of time and history, Dunn transforms nationality into the subject of an open-ended semantic negotiation, which leads to a tolerant and egalitarian view of the nation. He aims to furnish the clearly defined locality of North-East Fife with a fixed identity which, metonymically, proposes a sense of continuity in the diachronically changing selfhood of the whole of Scotland. While Dunn's nature poetry produces a degree of impersonality in which the lyrical first person singular becomes symbolic of a larger, communal self (as in the poetry of Charles Tomlison and Ted Hughes), his botanical sensibility provides for both a small-scale lyric that counterbalances the panoramic views of land, water and sky, and a sense of privacy which allows him to express his fidelity to place.

The concept of 'lyricism' underwrites in Dunn's work a liberation of the poetic self from extra-literary expectations, and also marks an aesthetic and moral behaviour that implies that the poet may adhere to an inner imaginative impulse when he or she acts as both a spokesman of a particular community of people and a guardian of universal values. The idea of inner emigration, interpreted as a mood of lyrical inwardness in Dunn, ties in with the same political-aesthetic agenda, since it significantly adds topicality to his assumed role of the sentient poet oriented towards an interpretive position of in-betweenness (being both an insider and an onlooker)

from which he may initiate a dialogue with place and community. Although pastoral often serves to defend his privacy and celebrate his solitary epicureanism, Dunn principally promotes in his work his belief in the survival of the lyric instinct as a means whereby the redemption of the historically situated individual may occur through art.

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# Appendix

## A Different Drummer

### An interview with Douglas Dunn*

**Attila Dósa** Your much appraised anthology of twentieth-century Scottish poetry has been reviewed flatteringly to have one weakness only: that you did not include some of your poems in it. Why does that representative collection of Scottish verse not contain some of the acclaimed poems of the anthologist?

**Douglas Dunn** Modesty is not necessarily a virtue, but I wouldn't want to claim it as my vice either. I just happen to believe that if you edit an anthology, then the editor should have the decency to absent his poems from the selection. I mean, how can you 'discuss yourself'? A good anthology is an act of criticism, and to have included my own poems would have been unreasonable and unwise. When I made my decision, I thought of Samuel Goldwyn's deathless remark, 'Include me out', and thought, too, that it means much the same if you say (or if I say) 'Exclude me in'. [...]

**AD** How do you feel about being translated?

**DD** It's heartening, and a real compliment, to find my poems translated into other languages. Or that's what I feel. Sometimes translation coincides with a visit to another country and an opportunity to meet poets and readers there. Although I've

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* This is a shortened version of: Attila Dósa, 'A Different Drummer' [an interview with Douglas Dunn], *Poetry Review*, 89.3 (1999), 27-34.

become a bad traveller the older I get, I love it once I've arrived and acclimatised. That poetry should have an international audience is encouraging.

**AD** What are the implications of your poems being read by audiences with different socio-cultural backgrounds for your work?

**DD** Feeling and intelligence associated with love, death, places, and so on, tend to be much the same everywhere. Even if different cultural traditions condition them differently, it has to be said that such feelings are human more than national.

**AD** To what extent do you believe a European appreciation is important to a Scottish poet?

**DD** My poems are also read in Australia and the United States, and I've recently returned from a literary visit to Venezuela. Perhaps I should widen your question beyond Europe. But I feel myself to be European, and I feel myself committed to an idea of Europe that is cultural before it is economic or political. To know that some of my poems have been read by those familiar, in mother tongues, with the works of Goethe, Heine, Rilke, Ronsard, Racine, Hugo, Baudelaire, József, Pushkin, Pasternak, Mickiewicz, Lorca, Leopardi, Montale, and so on, is truly exhilarating.

**AD** How do you perceive the role of the poet as a mediator between cultures?

**DD** My expertise in languages other than English is limited, and I couldn't claim a role as a mediator between cultures. About the best I can hope for is to represent my

own culture as I understand it and try to do so honestly. But part of my mind and temperament – more so, I feel, than my 'inheritance' as a Scot – is an interest in any poetry no matter where it comes from.

**AD** What is the cultural significance of poetic dialogues between languages?

**DD** When I've attended poetry festivals or other events abroad I usually come away from them with a sense, not so much of difference, but of shared values and shared concerns. Poetic procedures and emphases of style may differ, but it is what is held in common that impresses me.

**AD** Which poets and prose writers do you regard as your literary models?

**DD** As for 'models', I've tried to be my own man. If you mean 'influences' then there are so many that I wouldn't know where to begin. Is it possible to suggest Shakespeare as an 'influence' or 'model' and not be laughed at? I find myself to be eclectic. Of the writing of this century I agree with Brodsky that W. H. Auden was probably the great genius in the English language. It was my privilege to know Philip Larkin on terms of friendship, but I wouldn't claim him entirely as a 'model'. Writers like Jonson, Marvell, Dryden, Pope, Burns, Scott, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, Browning, Thomas Hardy, Robert Frost, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Lowell, D. J. Enright, Ted Hughes, Peter Porter, and many others, have also been important to me, as have the earlier Scottish writers of the late mediaeval and Renaissance periods, and Scottish poets of the eighteenth century, plus Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson. It's against that more indigenous reservoir of

'influences' and 'models', that I've introduced writing from other cultures. I see 'influence' as a turbulent and unsettled phenomenon.

**AD** Do you perceive the existence of a broader European cultural context for the 'barbarian' poetry written in the British Isles?

**DD** I think I coined the term 'barbarians' in a poetic context in the mid-1970s when I wrote the first part of my collection *Barbarians* (1979). Tony Harrison was in the same district of thought and feeling at the time, and Seamus Heaney also (perhaps even a little earlier). I used the term to mean the oppositional or socially and politically hostile aspect of contemporary poetic sensibility, which was shared chiefly by poets of a working-class and/or non-English origin in the British Isles. A friend of mine calls this the 'hairy-arsed school of poetry', although how he knows is a bit of a mystery to me. In much of Central and Eastern Europe, the same 'opposition' was expressed, but by far less direct means, by 'Aesopian' or semi-secret routes. In the North-West European Archipelago poetry was capable of a greater directness although it could be instructive to notice its protective ironies as well.

**AD** Is Cavafy's poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians' relevant to the present relationship between Scottish and English writing in any sense?

**DD** Cavafy's poem wasn't foregrounded in my mind. My notion of 'barbarians' came straight from the Greek, though – *bar-bar*, the uncouth sounds of the languages of those who weren't Greek and, allegedly, uncultured. The relationship

between English and Scottish literature wasn't a priority. At the time, I was living in Hull, in East Yorkshire, and although the poems are aware of my Scottish background and concerns, I was more conscious of the offence of class-based politics and systems organised around the apparent psychological need for demeaning and humiliation on the grounds of birth, nationality, and accent.

**AD** Is it necessary to define who the 'barbarians' are? Is it not the dynamic of the relationship that can be artistically more important and productive?

**DD** 'Barbarians', in the poems I wrote around that title and concept, are those who have otherwise been excluded from High Culture, but who, by the later part of the twentieth century in the North-West European Archipelago, come to possess it, very much to the embarrassment of those who assume that they have inherited and own the language and its poetic possibilities. Indeed, what you call 'the "dynamic" of the relationship' is where anything artistic might happen – or may have done, as this is an aspect of my work which is now in the past. At the same time it is part of my mind that could be re-activated if circumstances required it or mind and imagination conspired to bring it back to me. You seem to indicate a tension between 'High Culture' and the concerns of 'the people', and I would agree. I want to be a poet of High Culture but at the same time I don't want to be disloyal to my native parish, my home, my most immediate people, children, friends.

**AD** Is 'Britishness' an appropriate paradigm in reading contemporary Scottish writing, or has it ever been one?

**DD** 'Britishness' is a concept that has perplexed me in my adult years. It didn't bother me at all when I was younger. For example, when I was a schoolboy, I was in something called The Sea Cadet Corps. Many weekends were spent at a naval anchorage on the Firth of Clyde, while each summer we spent a fortnight on a ship of the Royal Navy. In my case it was HMS Diana, a 'D' class destroyer, based at Loch Foyle at Londonderry in Northern Ireland, from where we sailed to Gibraltar and back with units of the Home Fleet, and HMS Starling, a very famous frigate of the Second World War, flagship of Admiral Vian, a great scourge of German U Boats in its time, but by then a navigational training ship, and in which I sailed from Portsmouth to Randers in Denmark and then back to Harwich. I remember feeling very Royal Navy and very British. That I also felt very Scots didn't come into the equation even if companions called you 'Porridge' or 'Jock' or commented on your accent. You simply spoke back and held your end up. It strikes me that I've been doing the same ever since. I have to consider your question as pragmatically and as experienced as that. Poetry doesn't arise from a theory but from what the poet knows in life more than in intellect. Yet I have to admit that a 'British' national identity may well be in question but due [...] to the puzzlement of English people at the rise of a post-imperial multi-racial society, the erosion inflicted by the Provisional I.R.A., Ulster Loyalists, and other terrorist factions in Ireland with their adjunct activities on the mainland, the so-called National Party in England with its fascist and Nazi affiliations, and far less to the convictions of the Scottish National Party. Scottish Nationalism is distinguished in Europe for its democratic principles and procedures. It hasn't killed anyone while no one as far as I know has died for its cause in this century unless through stress, overwork, or disappointment. What I'm saying is that the nationalism with which I'm familiar is benign, and not to be

confused with nationalisms elsewhere or their lethal activities. It's not so much a question of 'Britishness' or 'Britishism' as of the English language. Scotland admits to three languages – English, Scots and Gaelic. The first of these is a *lingua franca*, but with a Scottish accent (although sometimes with an English accent), and it is the language in which I write and speak (with a Scottish accent), although I have a facility to speak in Scots if I feel like it or the social context invites me to do so. I've never been embarrassed by this fact, which I acknowledge, simply, as a fact. But 'Britishness' fails to offer a paradigm to a reading of contemporary Scottish writing. Why? – I believe the reason to be a matter of class politics among Scotland's writers and readers as much as nationalism.

**AD** Does European unification coincide with the loss of a (presumed or real) British national identity? Do you perceive it as a 'loss' at all?

**DD** I don't believe it's necessary for *any* national identity to undergo significant erosion as a result of the tendency towards European unity. Nor, for example, do I intend to change publishers or lose my friendships in England. Just how much difference there will be between today's status quo and a post-devolution state of affairs remains to be seen.

**AD** What is your opinion about the contemporary debate about Scottishness?

**DD** A debate about Scottishness has been going on for a very long time – ever since the run-up to the Treaty of Union of 1707. I'd just as soon stop talking and do something, but then I feel I don't want to try to be in any way politically

'influential'. There's something in me that resists 'simplifying myself' (as Turgenev put it) in order to be a political activist. It's a debate in which I've played little part other than through whatever's represented in my writing. Were I to stand on public platforms and say in prose some of the things I've said in verse, then not only would I be paraphrasing my verses, and repeating myself, but I'd be surrendering to a topical force inferior to the art I represent and to which I've dedicated my life. I don't know why – it could be reckless, or feckless – but I feel brave enough to say that.

**AD** Would political independence be helpful in bringing Scotland's perplexing view of itself to a solution?

**DD** Renan (I think) defined a nation as 'a large-scale solidarity'. Clearly, a country needs a nationality and citizenship to stand behind. Also, a country has to be in a position to take responsibility for itself; it shouldn't have to endure secondary status. Part of Scotland's trouble has been the willingness of so many of its people, in all walks of life, to behave as if second rate or inferior. I don't feel second rate, and I don't feel inferior. Boasting is not my style, and that's not my game here. Moaning and whingeing are conditions which I loathe and detest. I take full responsibility for my life and its decisions. Scotland is a country and a nationality into which I feel proud to have been born.

**AD** How do you imagine the cultural role of an independent Scotland in Europe?

**DD** Scotland's cultural role in Europe would, I hope, continue as at present and much as it always has. For a country of its size, its influence on Europe, and the world, has been big.

**AD** We can read more and more about the definition of the regional identities within Scotland. Some even question if there is such a thing as 'Scottishness'. Is not there a danger of these regional concerns' leading to the undermining of national concerns?

**DD** Regional identities within Scotland may be overstated by those who identify with these regions, to the detriment of a truly national picture. From the perspective of literature, however, it's a commonplace view that you have to be local before you can succeed in being universal. Writing that's local and stays local will probably be of interest only to readers in that locality. Personally, I feel that to be a serious problem only if an attempt is made to claim universality for works that clearly don't possess it.

**AD** Robert Crawford has been keen on making the concept of 'provincial' into a 'term of praise'. In his book *Identifying Poets* he establishes a new paradigm for interpreting regional poets, devolving authority from the centre to what had previously been seen as periphery. However, is it not a restrictive reading which foregrounds certain strains of territorial and social concerns to the detriment of aesthetic ones?

**DD** I now live in Dairsie, smaller even than Tayport, and distant from metropolitan centres. It's a temperamental thing with me – I don't like living in cities, although I enjoy opportunities to visit them from time to time. Much of my writing refers to places and people, which comes naturally to me. Perhaps it's simply part of the apparatus I need in order to express my formal and aesthetic concerns. To try to write poetry at the present time obliges a poet to confront and struggle with a range of technical, formal issues, interwoven through the poet's thematic, emotional and intellectual obsessions. In the act of writing, the substance which a poet tries to shape – like wayward clay on a potter's wheel, handled by an apprentice potter – is both what the poet is trying to say and the technical means by which the poet tries to form the poem. It's hard to take one's mind off either of them, so that criticism which neglects a poet's artistry for the sake of chasing after an idea (no matter how interesting the idea) always seems to me to be incomplete. Or it could just be that a readable, technical criticism is difficult to achieve.

**AD** Can we say that the way to the comprehension of the particular leads through the comprehension of the universal in your poetry?

**DD** I work in a University that was founded in 1411-12, and which is recognised as one of the major universities of Europe and perhaps of the world. It's a very well known university – so I don't feel conscious of being on the periphery except perhaps in an imaginative sense. But I discover within myself the same germ of freedom, style, of self-challenge, that I find myself impressed by in a writer like Robert Louis Stevenson. Did Sir Walter Scott feel peripheral? Did Stevenson? Did Robert Burns for that matter? – I suspect Burns's localism to have been a tactic

calculated by a powerful intellect simply to make it known that he existed. But I'm glad you see a wider frame of reference in my work. Throughout my writing life I feel I've engaged as much as has been possible for me with European literatures. I've always had to work hard for my living and so I've never enjoyed the leisure or the means to cultivate some of my interests as much as I would have liked. It annoys me, but my Samoa will always be one of the mind. Besides, in mid-life, I've discovered that I'm a practical man as much as a poet. Or practical-poetic. Or poetic-practical.

**AD** But can a contemporary Scottish poet afford nowadays to disregard debates about provincialism and regionalism? Are you irritated by the subject?

**DD** If I don't disregard them some of the time then I don't see how I can get anything written, because far from everything I write is addressed to 'the matter of Scotland'. But I'm not irritated by the presence of these arguments. Any writer lives and works in a specific intellectual and political climate and it could be damaging were you to take your eye off these contemporary issues for too long. I say 'could' because it depends very much on the writer. God forbid that a poet should be *obliged* to be a politician.

**AD** In your early volumes there can be observed an inclination towards what seems to be a politically / socially committed kind of poetry. Representations of working-class existences in *Terry Street* and your admitted allegiance to industrial Clydeside prompted your description as a leftist poet well into the 1980s. How did you react to such – again, we can say – restrictive readings of your work then?

**DD** I still find myself on the left side of the political spectrum in that I still hold to a belief in social justice. But to see me as that and only that kind of poet is restrictive or limiting, by which I mean, of course, that it's not how I see myself entirely. My book *Elegies* (1985), for example, isn't about Scotland although some of the poems are set there (as well as in Hull, and in a rural part of France, and in Dundee).

**AD** What is the role of imagination in the (re)creation of communal loyalties?

**DD** Imagination is crucial to poetry and any other form of literature and art. In his masterpiece novel *Lanark* Alasdair Gray writes of Glasgow as an 'unimagined' city, a city that for many years was somehow (or by and large) avoided by art. Even if there was much interest in art there Glasgow was rarely its subject. All that has changed and I'm convinced it's true of other parts of Scotland as well as of Glasgow. From my own view of my work (which like any other writer's is unreliable) I feel that my '(re)creation' of communal loyalties occurs in some of my poems but in most of my short stories.

**AD** I think the act of imagination is a key principle in your poetry. Can we see *Dante's Drum-kit* as a landmark in the development of increasingly autonomous forms of representation in your work?

**DD** It's not that I've tried deliberately to disengage myself from the political side of my poetry, but after the effort of writing *Elegies* I found what I had to say politically wearing a bit thin. There are poems of political consequence in *Northlight* (1988)

and *Dante's Drum-kit* (1993) but on the whole I've been wary of that dimension of my writing, chiefly because I'm conscious of having reached a moment in my so-called career when self-parody or tedious repetition becomes a distinct possibility. I noticed this tendency in two older friends, the late Philip Larkin and the late Norman MacCaig, each of whom found himself becoming a caricature both physically and on the page and neither of whom enjoyed it. At my age (56) it's a good idea to try to stay new, if it can be managed; and if not, then a better idea to shut up and get on with something else. I *hope* that the 'act of imagination' is more conspicuous in my recent work. What I find, though, is that having published a book, I somehow, without deliberating it, make sure that the next book is different from its predecessor. I don't know why this happens.

**AD** Where does the title of the book come from?

**DD** Titles are always a problem for me. By *Dante's Drum-kit* I think I was drawing attention to the percussive side of poetic rhythm which is a bit loud in that volume. It was certainly an aspect of poetry I found myself fascinated by during the time I was writing the poems collected in that book. I could even have been drawing attention to the fact that I'd written a poem (in the book) in terza rima.

**AD** Is there a categorical imperative you think a poet should observe?

**DD** All a poet is obliged to be is a poet. Once that's been accepted and digested, then the poet can be any sort of poet the poet needs to be – and I emphasise 'need' and not 'want'. Just so long as the poet doesn't tell lies to himself or herself and try

to use poetry for the purposes of the wide range of forms special pleading on offer, the most common form of which is self-advertising, then the freedom to be a poet should be infinite.

**AD** Do you have any affinity with moral philosophy?

**DD** I studied moral philosophy for a year when an undergraduate. I learned how to use expressions such as 'that which' and spent a year unlearning them. I also worked as a secretary to my tutor, who was writing a book on the concept of liberty. He would dictate to me, I'd write it down in longhand, and then on a typewriter; and then I'd count the number of words. If there were more than twenty-six words in the sentence then it had to be revised until it was shorter. There could be no more words in a sentence than the letters of the alphabet. I asked him why, in a book on the concept of liberty, he had to set himself this ridiculous unfreedom of sentences. He looked at me as if I were stupid. I looked at him as if he were stupid. We went on like that for weeks. It took him a very long time to pay me, and, in the meantime, I had to read his wife's poems. When he came round to my little house in Terry Street to give me the money he owed me, I was practising my clarinet – a florid but difficult study from a book of instruction and exercises by Klosé, I recall. He was horrified, and said I was wasting my time with 'music' (pronounced like a dirty word) when I should be studying philosophy. Let my answer to your question be implied from the foregoing.

**AD** To what extent is your *ars poetica* emotionally motivated?

**DD** 'Emotionally' is not the word I'd choose, although feeling is implicated in the ways in which I write. 'Eccentric' could be better in that it includes the sense of emotion as well as individuality. As it happens, I'm fairly expert in my knowledge of written and published *ars poetica* and *art poétique* and so on. I'm fascinated by these things although I'm the first to admit that they don't help all that much when you come to put pen to paper. Writings like these are of the past, while one's own writing is of the present. No matter how much you know, or you think you know, the struggle is always with contemporary issues in aesthetics, and these are discovered in the act of writing, no matter what you're writing about, whether intimate, or political, or whatever.

**AD** What are you working on currently?

**DD** I have a poem to write, and it's a long poem, of which I've completed around 115 pages so far. It's spoken by Eugene Politovsky, the Flag Engineer on the Russian fleet that sailed round the world to meet its destiny at the battle of Tsushima during the Russo-Japanese War. Part I was published in *Encounter* in 1983 under the title 'Politovsky's Letters Home' – the poem is in the form of Politovsky's letters to his wife. Since a few weeks ago, it's now called *The Donkey's Ears*, which is what Tsushima means in Japanese. It's about the beginning of the twentieth century as well as specific to its character. Historically, Politovsky wasn't a poet. He wasn't even much of a prose writer if translations of his letters (which were published in English) are anything to go by. I've made him a secret poet and overt engineer. Why I'm writing the poem is a mystery to me. What I'm clear about is that it's not a poem about Scotland, but about the world, and the

hellish century which is about to become another century, indeed, a new millennium. And who knows how hellish that's going to be? I'm not ashamed of the fact that while Scotland is on the run-up to its first parliament since the early eighteenth century I'm writing a poem spoken by a Russian engineer who died at 'the Trafalgar of the east' in May 1905. It doesn't faze me because I've written lots of other poems, some of which abut on present Scottish issues, but most of which don't. I'm incorrigible. I hope always to be truculent, obtuse, and incorrigible. My Muse demands of me that I have room for anything at all, for everything, the erotic and lyrical, the topical and political, the discursive and autobiographical, the main theme and the absolutely digressive, the very significant and the nursery rhyme. If there's anything I want as a poet, it's the stamina to maintain diversity and the response to what's necessary for my circumstances of writing.

St Andrews,

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